

The New Walk of the New Self

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC Chinese Services on October 16, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ In 1865, there were approximately 250,000 black slaves in the state of Texas. Two years earlier, Abraham Lincoln's **Emancipation Proclamation** took effect declaring all slaves to be freed in the Confederate states.
 - ▶ But because news moved slowly back then, it took two years before this good news reached Texas. It wasn't until June 19, 1865, standing on a balcony in Galveston, that Union General Gordon Granger proclaimed the emancipation of all slaves in Texas.
 - This is why Texans celebrate the holiday known as **Juneteenth**. That's June 19th combined together. Former slaves began this tradition a year later, and it's been going strong for 150 years.

- ❖ Juneteenth commemorates the freedom of 250,000 slaves, but it also communicates a profound theological truth. For two whole years, the emancipation of these slaves was *accomplished*, but it wasn't *applied* until the day they heard the good news. Until the day they learned about their freedom.
 - ▶ **It's understandable that, during those two years, they trudged around under the heavy yoke of slavery.** They lived as slaves and not as freedman because their emancipation had yet to be applied. They had yet to hear and believe the good news. But on June 19th, 1865, good news was preached, and they knew they were free.

- ❖ But imagine if some of those slaves, returned to their master's plantation, returned to their labor, and continued living as slaves. **They hear this Emancipation Proclamation. They believe it. They receive it. But they go on living as though nothing has changed.** They still walk under the heavy yoke of slavery.
 - ▶ Does that make any sense? It's understandable when they didn't know or believe they were free. But now they know. Now they believe they're freedmen. Which is why it makes no sense for them to still live and behave like slaves.

- ❖ **In the first three chapters of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul has declared and explained a cosmic Emancipation Proclamation.** He been telling us of how in Christ, "*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*" (1:7) We were once dead in our sins, blindly following the prince of the power of the air (2:1-2). We were enslaved to spiritual forces and to our own sin. "*4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.*" (2:4-5)
 - ▶ **That's the Christian's Emancipation Proclamation.** And now in chapter 4, Paul shifts gears and begins to exhort us to live in light of our new found freedom. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (4:1).
 - In vv1-16 that means living as **a unified people** since we've been unified in Christ. And now in v17 and on, Paul's calling us to live as **a changed people** since we've been changed in Christ.

- ❖ Look at v17, “*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do.*” He’s writing mainly to Gentile Christians, and his point is that their lives should be different than before. They’ve experienced a conversion. **So they should no longer be walking like the unconverted. They should no longer be living and behaving as if they’re still under the yolk of slavery.**
 - ▶ In vv20-24, Paul offers a theological reason why. Then in vv25-32, he gives practical examples of a converted life. And in chapter 5:1-2, he returns to the language of walking. He says be imitators of God, “*And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.*” That’s how a Christian – a freedman in Christ – should be walking.
- ❖ That’s a summary of our passage. Now let’s go more in depth. I’ve divided it into four sections: 1) The Necessity for Change, 2) The Foundation for Change, 3) Our Responsibility in Change, 4) Our Motivation in Change.

The Necessity for Change

- ❖ Let’s begin by stressing the necessity for change in our lives if we claim to be Christians. Notice how Paul tells his readers they *must* no longer walk as the Gentiles do – as unconverted unbelievers do. It’s a must.
 - ▶ Look at v20, “²⁰*But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him.*” So it’s fair to assume – now that you’re a Christian – that you should be walking differently. A change in your life is a safe assumption. It’s actually a necessity.
- ❖ Now I want to be clear: **The text doesn’t say you have to change your behavior before you can be saved.** I think that’s the impression a lot of non-Christians get. That you change your life first and then come to Jesus to be saved, but no, that’s not the gospel. **The gospel says you’re saved by grace through faith – not by grace through change.**
 - ▶ The gospel says God loves you in all your mess. You haven’t cleaned up your life yet. But even in your mess, he loves you and offers his salvation. I like how Max Lucado puts it. He says, “*God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way.*” He loves you where you’re at, but he loves you too much to leave you there. He’s going to change you. If you’ve been saved, change is a necessity.
- ❖ That’s why it makes no sense – if you call yourself a Christian – to continue to think, feel, and act like an unconverted, unbeliever. It makes no sense.
 - ▶ **It’s like being a slave who knows he’s free but still, out of habit, continues to do his slavemaster’s bidding.** We’re like the prisoner who’s been freed, who’s broken shackles rest gingerly around our wrists and ankles. If we’d just get up, they’d fall off, and we could walk away into freedom. But we ignorantly remain in our prison cells with chains around us.

- ❖ I agree it makes no sense, and that's the point. Paul's point is that believers should not be living like non-believers. In vv25-32, he's going to say to stop lying, to control your anger, to not steal, to watch your mouth, to speak kindly, to forgive others.
 - ▶ Those are obviously things Christians need to do because they're commanded. **But sadly most people think that's essentially the message of Christianity.** "Don't behave like that. Change your ways and start behaving like this. Behave like a Christian." But that's not the heart of the Christian message. **Christianity is not about putting off and putting on certain behaviors.**

The Foundation for Change

- ❖ That's not Paul's understanding of Christianity. That's not how he taught it to the Ephesians. **Look in v20, here he explains the foundation for change – the reason why he expects them to live differently.** This is our second point.
 - ▶ Some of these Christians were living unchanged lives, and Paul says, "²⁰*But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*"
- ❖ So Paul expects change in the way they live. He expects certain Christian behaviors. **He has a whole list starting in v25, but he won't let them get there without first going through vv20-24.** He's not just talking to them about putting off and putting on behaviors. **He's talking about putting off your old self and putting on the new self.**
 - ▶ In other words, Paul's not going to tell them what they ought to do until he reminds them of who they actually are. **That's because Christianity is about *being* something before it's about *doing* something.**
- ❖ Lots of seekers are hesitant to become a Christian because they think they need to first stop doing this or start doing that. And it sounds too hard and unappealing. But that's the wrong focus. Behavioral change is not the pressing issue. **The pressing issue is *not* about changing your behavior but about being changed altogether from the inside out.**
- ❖ There are some of you trying to become a Christian by putting on certain behaviors. That's the biggest mistake people make about Christianity. If you ask the average person, "What's a Christian?", they'll say a Christian is a moral person. Who doesn't lie. Who doesn't steal. Who goes to church. Who gives to the poor. A Christian is a good person."
 - ▶ No, that's not a Christian. **A Christian is not just a good person. A Christian is a new person.** It's a person who has come to Christ in faith and has been utterly transformed from the inside out.

- ❖ This is the most liberating news. Some of you are thinking about becoming a Christian, but you're not sure. You're thinking, "What does that mean? Does that mean I have to stop my sexual immorality? Will I have to control my temper? Do I have to watch my foul language and stop telling half-truths? Do I need to forgive that person who hurt me so badly?"
 - ▶ The answer is "Yes *eventually*." Because all those behaviors are addressed in v25 and on, so you can't ignore them. But you're going about it the wrong way. You're getting ahead of yourself. **Before you get to v25, you have to go through vv22-24.**

- ❖ **You have to put off and put on a new self *before* you put off and put on a new morality, a new set of behaviors.** This is how the Ephesians learned Christ. Paul taught them that to become a Christian involves a fundamental break with your former life. You've put off that old self. You've died to it. That's not you anymore, so don't go walking in that life again.
 - ▶ **When you're in prison, you wear that ugly orange jumpsuit. That's prison-wear. But when you're freed, you put off those clothes and put on new ones.** You're on the outside now. Why would you still wear that ugly jumpsuit? It makes no sense. That's not who you are. You're a free man (woman) not a prisoner.

Our Responsibility in Change

- ❖ The foundation for change, that's what Paul is trying to communicate. If you want to experience real change in your life, then you need to be changed in Christ. You need to come to Jesus to be converted, to become a new person.
 - ▶ **If you have this experience of conversion, then you now have a responsibility in changing yourself.** This is our third point. Earlier I said Christianity is about being something *before* it's about doing something. **Well, if you're now a new person, then you better get to doing something.**

- ❖ Paul describes what you need to do in v23, "*to be renewed in the spirit of your minds*". The verb tense suggests a continuous action. **We're talking about a continuous renewal process.** We're to be transformed in our behavior by the daily renewal of our minds. **That means thinking daily about your new identity in Christ.** That's your responsibility when it comes to changing yourself.
 - ▶ **It would be cruel to tell slaves – before emancipation – to stop acting like slaves.** To start living like freedmen. That's not helpful. You're just mocking them. But if they've been emancipated, then telling them to stop acting like slaves is exactly what they need to hear. They need someone to tell them to be who you are, to start living like freedmen.

- ❖ **In other words, renew your mind by recalling who you are in Christ – and then live like it.** Be who you are! If you're free in Christ, then live like a freedman. Walk free. **Stop living and behaving as if you're still under the yoke of slavery.**
 - ▶ "Just stop it." You can say that to a Christian. That's not being legalistic or moralistic. **That's not asking too much as long as you root that command to "stop it" in the foundation of the gospel, of their conversion, of who they now are in Christ.**

- ❖ **It would be asking too much to tell a man to stop acting like a prisoner when in fact he's still in chains, still in his cell.** But if the chains are off, if the prison doors are wide open, and yet he's still moping around in his cell, the loving thing to do is to tell him to be who you are, to stop acting like a prisoner, and to walk out of there like the free person you really are.
- ❖ By the way, parents, keep this in mind. **We all want our kids to act like good little Christians.** But that's asking too much, it's legalistic and moralistic, if they're not yet Christians. We can't expect our kids to behave like Christians if they're still slaves to sin. **Before they hear "Stop it" from you, they need to hear the gospel from you.** They need to be invited to trust in Jesus to free them from sin, to make them new creations.
 - ▶ And if they are Christians, the next time you have to say "stop it", remind them that they actually can *because* of who they are in Christ. That's the difference between parenting through morality versus parenting through the gospel.

Our Motivation in Change

- ❖ So now we're equipped to look at the conclusion of our text where Paul offers five examples of how we ought to behave if we're being who we are. I want to show you what ought to motivate us to change. This is our fourth point.
- ❖ Notice a couple of general observations. **Notice how, in all five examples, Paul pairs a negative prohibition with a positive command.** **1)** We're to put away falsehood and to speak the truth (v25). **2)** We're not to sin in our anger. We're to reconcile in a timely manner (v26). **3)** We're to no longer steal. Instead we're to do honest work (v28) **4)** We're not to speak in ways that corrupt but in ways that build up (v29). **5)** We're not to grow bitter and angry with each other but to be kind, loving, and willing to forgive (vv31-32).
- ❖ What that tells me is that it's not enough to simply put off the old self if you're not putting on the new. It's not just about avoiding sin but also pursuing righteousness. **And then notice how Paul keeps attaching a theological reason to every exhortation.** When you're disciplining someone, it's so important to not just give bare commands but to offer a theological reason. To explain why.
 - ▶ And the key is to root it all in a **gospel motivation**. That's what Paul does in chapter 5:1-2, "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*"
 - Paul's saying, "**Be who you are. You're an adopted child of God. So imitate your Heavenly Father like any child would.** Walk in love just as Christ loved you. Give of yourself to serve the good of others just as Christ gave himself up for you." It's all about having the right motives.
- ❖ **How do you raise your kids to be honest?** To put away falsehood and only speak truth? (v25) You can motivate them in a few ways. **You can use fear.** "You better not lie. You better tell the truth or God's going to punish you. Or people won't trust you. You won't have any friends and you'll die alone." That might work. You can scare them straight.

- ❖ **Or you can appeal to their pride.** “Don’t lie. You don’t want to be like those liars. We’re better than them. Tell the truth like good people.” That might work. You might have kids who are trained to tell the truth. But why do they? Because it stokes their ego, and it adds to their contempt of anyone they ever catch in a lie. So you might have yourself a truthful kid, but he’s a pretty awful kid to be around.
- ❖ The problem with appealing to fear or pride is that it’s only so effective until that day an even stronger motivation or pressure overcomes. **If they’re only telling the truth because of a self-serving motivation, then one day they’ll face a situation where telling the truth won’t serve them well.** Then why would I? Why should I?
- ❖ Do you see why motivation matters? In every congregation, you have two kinds of people sitting next to each other. Both are singing. Both are praying. Both are trying to live and behave like Christians in their day-to-day life.
 - ▶ One, because of **fear**. “Because if I mess up, God’s going to get me. If I don’t behave, he’ll punish me.” And the other, because of **pride**. “Because I’m a good Christian and this is what good Christians do. Thank God I’m not like those immoral, godless people out there.”
- ❖ But then there’s a third person who’s doing the same things, trying to live the same way. But motivated by **love** – *love for God* for his grace to us in the gospel. *Love for others* because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.
 - ▶ **This person, motivated by the gospel, is walking in love and obedience – and not for self-serving reasons.** So even if one day he faces a situation where walking in love and obedience to God is actually going to be costly, he won’t be deterred. Because he was never doing it for himself in the first place. That’s the difference right motive makes.
- ❖ The question is: Which person are you? **What’s motivating you to walk like a Christian?** How did you learn Christ? According to the gospel, he is the One who has called you, freed you, changed you, and given you a new identity in him – go now and be who you are.