

Living the New Self

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[0 : 0 0] Today's reading is from Ephesians chapter 4 verse 17 to chapter 5 verse 2. Starting in verse 17 we read, the new life.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the frutility of their minds. They are darkened in the understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.

Due to their hardness of heart, they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But this is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life, and is corrupt through deceitful desires.

But to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on your new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[1 : 0 8] Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that he may give grace to those who hear, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore, be imitatis of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, a frequent offering and sacrifice to God.

[2 : 2 9] This is the word of God. All right.

Thank you, Margo, for that warm introduction, and thank you, Kevin, for that introduction. So, again, my name is Margo. I'm part of Oasis CG. I'm also working with Young Life right now, and part of my identity is also as a Hong Konger, and I don't know if you know Hong Kongers, what do we love to drink?

Ice lemon tea. And, of course, you know, being health conscious as I am, I always ask for less ice and less sugar, right? And, you know, growing up, that's like my favorite drink, right?

Ice lemon tea. And I really, really wanted to have an ice cream, which was just like ice lemon tea. And so one day, when I was a small child, I remember I was walking with my parents in Beijing, we're traveling, and I walk across the store, and then this store was selling like ice cream, I think, and then it said lime sherbet.

And I was like lime equals lemon, okay? Sherbet, kind of like ice cream, I guess. And so I was like spending 10 minutes just like begging my parents, like, please, please, I really, really want this lime sherbet.

[3 : 42] Like, please, mom, like, please, dad. And my parents were like, ah, like, I don't think so. Like, hey, you know, we're in a hurry. But then like after, you know, a huge tantrum, they're like, okay, okay, here's your lime sherbet.

Okay, like, be happy. And I was like the happiest kid in the world. And when I put that lime sherbet in my mouth, I realized it tasted nothing like ice lemon tea. It was like a sour bomb had went off in my mouth.

And I realized I was like, I was crying. I was like, oh my gosh, this is so bad. And my parents, you know, being good parents, they're like, no, you must finish your lime sherbet. Right? And so I was probably like the saddest looking kid in the world, like eating lime sherbet out in the street.

And people were probably like really confused. And the thing is like, and the reason I tell this story is because, I think sometimes we have this expectation of like what it is. Right? But in versus the reality of this.

And I think often Paul paints in Ephesians and then kind of the passage we're just reading, how the church is such a beautiful church. You know, people are changing. People are transforming.

[4 : 40] People are growing. You know, people are no longer stealing, but are now like generous to one another, like all these amazing things. And you know, sometimes, sometimes we do feel like that. Right? We feel like, man, we're growing.

You know, I feel like, you know, some people in my CG was just saying recently, like they feel like, wow, they've like really been changing in the past few months. And wow, that's amazing. That's great to hear. But sometimes it's also, it feels like, you know, church doesn't necessarily meet the expectation of what that is.

It isn't always perfect. You might feel like, oh, I remember sometimes, you know, you speak truth and love. It completely backfires. Right? You feel like, man, the church could be doing so much more.

Like you're really passionate about evangelism, about serving young people, but you know, other people aren't there yet. And maybe you feel like, wow, church is great. You know, I know a lot of people, but I feel like, you know, it's not, I don't feel like I'm like, can be super vulnerable around these people.

And even for myself, I remember when I was leading CG, where this one session, I was like, it was just me and this other guy. And I was like, dang, like maybe we need to close down our CG. Right?

[5 : 46] And it's like, sometimes it's hard. And I think here in Ephesians, Paul talks about, you know, this cosmic plan of Christ, adoption to the gospel, all these really great things.

And then there's this perfect, loving community church. But then there seems to be somewhere, there's like a gap in between. Right? And that's where we're going to go today. And here, Paul tells us in today's passage, that we can only have this loving church.

We can only love others by the daily renewal of our identity as God's new creation. Okay, let me repeat this. So Paul tells us that we can really only love each other through the daily renewal of our identity as God's creation.

And he starts off with our hardened hearts. Right? In verse 17, 18, he paints this picture of our old life. What were we like before? You know, our old minds, our old hearts.

And the key idea in verse 18 is that, you know, our hearts, all these issues from our life actually came down from our hardened hearts. And that basically just means like our hearts were like stone and it progressively hardens and, you know, no matter what other people say, like we're just not going to listen to them.

[6 : 55] And it progressively develops. Right? So this hardened heart, you know, leads to us being ignorant of how we can live life, ignorant of how we can love others well. And it leads to being alienated from God and also ends up us being stuck in these loops of sin, these patterns of sin that we feel like we can't get out of.

I remember when I was a teenager, actually, I feel like I was always stuck in these patterns of sin. Right? I remember myself, I was a super prideful kid, you know, always trying to seek external validation, you know, trying to get the highest grade, trying to compare myself with other people.

My heart was just so hard. I was just captured by this idea that, man, I needed to achieve a lot of things so that I would have value. And I remember I was just being a huge jerk and this heart, you know, led to me just behaving like really poorly and just like treating my friends really poorly.

I remember belittling them, belittling them, you know, trash talking, you know, as all good like teenage boys do. And yeah, I remember, you know, in my cringiest moment where I was in math class and we're just like trash talking to each other and I remember I was like, okay, it sounds better in Chinese, trust me, but I was like, you know, who is the idiot and who is the genius?

And I was telling a friend and I was like, the class was like silent and I was like, for a split moment, I was like, yeah, I got him. And then I realized that actually I was the biggest idiot in the room, right?

[8 : 20] And so, it was like all these things that I was like treating my friends really poorly. I was stuck in this loop and I felt the consequences. You know, I didn't feel like I was any better.

I constantly felt stressed and it was like, no matter what I did, I couldn't get out of this loop. I couldn't, through my own new insights, get out of these behaviors and whenever someone told me, like, hey, you know, when I went to church sometimes, like, people were like, oh, you know, love your friends, okay, like, okay, and then I would find ways to change my behavior a little bit but it feels like I'm still stuck, right?

I would, like, find other ways to, like, trash talk my friends and, yeah, you know, even now, like, God's redeemed my heart and it's great but sometimes these old patterns of sin still exist, right?

And it's not just like, and Paul doesn't talk about, oh, just one or two sins, it's all our sins, right? And maybe for you, it's status, right? Security. Maybe it's prestige, you know, finding approval from others, like, there's these things that kind of hook into our hearts and we feel like, man, sometimes we're just stuck in these loops and that's why I think Paul reminds us, right, as Corinthians, that actually we can't lift ourselves up, you know, we as flawed people, we can't use our own knowledge, our own strength to lift ourselves up.

Actually, what we need is a new heart, right? Like, with our, I don't know if you guys ever experienced this but, you know, when I was a teenager, my mom was always like, oh, you know, clean your bed, pack your room and I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay, mom, okay, mom, but it would just go from one year to out of the other year or like, I mean, unpopular colleague said something or unpopular boss said something, you're like, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay, but then it kind of just like goes from one year out of the other year, right?

[9 : 57] Like, our hearts are so hardened that, you know, even though like people give us new advice, new ideas, it's like hard for us and even if you look at humanity, like, I used to work for a humanitarian organization and I think as a collective, like, we've come so far, you know, we've had so much progress but if you just look at the news today, racism, war, suffering, it seems like we're stuck in these like old patterns, right?

Like, no matter how hard we try, we can't get out and I'm all for, you know, podcasts, you know, I'm the podcast person or like self-help books, I love those, you know, don't get me wrong, go for it, read it, but those aren't going to dramatically change our hearts, change our lives and what we need, Paul, thankfully, you know, doesn't just leave us here like, oh, okay, good luck, you know, he uses the word but, which is, you know, one of Paul's favorite words and he tells us in the next section that actually what we need is this constant renewal in our new identity and verse 20, it talks about how, hey, our minds are no longer, you know, the old minds no longer darkened, we've now learned Christ, I want to pause here for a moment, what does it mean by, oh, we're just learned Christ, you know, it's actually not about just, obviously, it's great, the teaching of Jesus is great, knowledge, new knowledge that Jesus gives us, amazing, but the key thing is actually our goal as Christians, as apprentices to Jesus, is to become like Jesus, our goal is not to have new knowledge and that helps with how we live our life, our goal is to become like Jesus and in verses 22, he talks about how we put on our old self, you know, our self that was corrupting, that was degenerating and this is a beautiful image and he said, we said yes to Jesus already, we put on this new self and so even for those who haven't said yes to Jesus, that's totally okay, you know, he's inviting you every day and so this is a process that's already happened, right, putting off the old self, putting on the new self but why does Paul remind us even though it's already happened, right, and it's because we often forget and we need this daily renewal, it's like a person, you know, needing to have food every single day or a plant needing nutrients, we need renewal as verse 23 talks about, our mind needs constant renewal and while we cannot earn it, we cannot earn our faith, we cannot earn our salvation, daily renewal requires effort, okay, let me repeat this, so our faith, our walk with Jesus, while it cannot be earned, requires effort in our walk, now I don't become a better apprentice to Jesus,

I don't become a better Christian just from sitting on Sunday service and just like passively absorbing what the preacher is saying, we need to work in our faith, right, and a lot of it actually is about, you know, what the Bible calls like spiritual disciplines or what we can call today as like daily habits, right, habits like God's word, listening to God's word, prayer, you know, solitude, silence, all these good things or even like engaging in a community that challenges you but still loves you, right, there's all these like great habits, things that we can renew ourselves in God every day and if that sounds hard, it's because it is, right, 21st century, we are in this hyper-connected society where we always need to be on top of the news, we're always checking up on what's our favorite sports team doing, how, yeah, maybe checking our emails quite a lot and we feel like, you know, we're constantly needing to be on top of things and so I want to present you kind of two scenarios.

First scenario is, I don't know what you do when you wake up in the morning but I think for most of us, we, you know, check our phones, right, whether that's in the bathroom or like somewhere else. You're just doing your daily routine and you're like, you know, checking your emails, going social media or like reading the news and there's always something that maybe annoys you or like triggers you or like just gives you anxiety like, wow, this world is like not a great place, right, and versus scenario two where, you know, you're still doing your morning routine but you're just spending 10 minutes, 10 minutes just reading the word of God and sometimes, you know, it doesn't penetrate super deeply but that's okay, right, you're reading about God's steadfast love and just like reminding yourself like, okay, yeah, I'm a child of God and you have this small sense of peace and then you get out the door, you know, in these two scenarios, you both get out the door, you run to the MTR, right, because we're always in a hurry in Hong Kong and you come across your first battle of the day, a slow walker, right, and you're like, okay, okay, if you think about it, in which of these two scenarios are you going to have the most patience with the slow walker, right, and I'm always guilty of it, right,

I'm always like, oh, trying to just like get across them really quickly, like, why can't you walk faster, right, and it's like, wow, actually, what I realized is, and what Paul is saying is that behavior change comes from a heart and our mind transformation, right, and actually, the battle is already lost how you started the day, you know, the battle isn't in that MTR slow walker or in that office space where you have this really annoying colleague that, you know, that constantly talks, it's actually won or lost in the morning, right, how are we spending our time feeding our minds and feeding our hearts?

[15 : 17] We have a choice, actually, we're not just passive people, you know, mindlessly absorbing social media, mindlessly absorbing technology where we can choose what we can feed in our hearts and our minds and we need this constant renewal, reminding of this new identity in God's creation and as a psychology major, I love looking at just research, reading books and actually research has also shown that, you know, behavior change comes from change in our identity, right, and that's why every day we actually need the daily renewal of our new identity.

Who are we really? Am I just a office worker? Am I just a younger brother? I'm actually a new creation as well, right, and it's hard because, you know, I think Paul used the idea of like new clothes and old clothes.

You know, even though our new clothes fit really well, you know, are probably more practical, aren't as worn, don't have holes, there's something more comfortable about wearing these like old clothes.

Like I have this camp t-shirt from like 10 years ago that I just keep wearing from my pajamas. Like, I should probably throw that out. It's probably not very, not very great. But it's like, yeah, there's something about these old clothes that we feel more comfortable in.

And that's why Paul constantly asks us to renew ourselves so that we don't forget. And moving on, Paul, you know, in the next verse, right, he uses the word therefore.

[16 : 45] You know, another of Paul's favorite words, therefore. And what does he do here when he talks about, you know, the next section, how do we love each other well? He connects actually the vertical dimension, like our relationship with God with the horizontal, which is how we love each other well.

And he wants us to, he wants to point out kind of the insight, which is, actually for a lot of us, how we love each other well depends on how our relationship is secure in God.

Are we being renewed in his identity every day? Right? We can't force ourselves to change our behavior through willpower alone. It might work for a while, but it won't last. Right? He's telling us that, wow, we need to renew ourselves in God every day so that we can love each other.

And how do we love each other? Well, we model ourselves after Christ. And I think the really cool thing is here Paul talks about it's no longer just, you know, avoiding sin.

And, you know, sometimes we're like, I don't know if you heard, like, oh, you know, rules of life. It's like, okay, just don't be a jerk. Don't be, don't be a bad person, right? That's how you should live life. Like, okay, you can do anything else, but just don't be a jerk.

[17 : 51] Right? Actually, Paul doesn't say that. He says, actually, you know, we have to no longer sin and love each other. Right? In verse 24, 25, sorry, he says, you know, we no longer lie, but speak the truth.

We no longer steal, but we're being generous with each other. 29, no longer gossip, but say words that really encourage each other. No, 31, no longer be bitter, replace it with tender heartedness and forgiveness.

And so the idea is, we're just no, we're not just no longer sinning. We're trying to love each other. And actually, Paul has this really great insight into our behavior. See, we, the tricky thing is, we can't replace our sinful behavior with nothing.

It's like, for example, I don't know, sometimes I tell myself, like, okay, Marco, like, today, you need to stop using your phone so much. You've been on your phone too much. So I keep telling myself that.

And I'm like, okay, no, but you stop to carry your phone around because it's, you need to communicate with other people. And so, you know, you go about your day, you're at a bank, you know, lining up to ATM or you're in a bathroom with nothing to do.

[18 : 57] And what do we do? We pull out our phones, right? Automatically. I'm like, on social media and I'm like, I catch myself. Five minutes later, I'm like, okay, what did I just do? And it's like, when we tell ourselves not to do something but don't replace it with something, we automatically go back to that old thing that we're doing.

And so, for us, it's, we can only substitute a sinful behavior, a sinful act with a loving act. That's the only way it works. And what does that look like today?

Well, for example, I don't know about you guys, but during the fifth wave, I was complaining quite a lot about, you know, government policies, COVID policies, whatnot. Instead of doing that, let's pray for the government, right?

Instead of ghosting conflicts, which is super easy to do these days, you know, just don't respond in a phone text. Engage in conflict. Engage in a loving way.

Instead of feeling bitter that other people aren't where you are, like, man, like, church could be doing so much more, like, man, we could be serving the poor, we could be serving these communities, we could be doing more.

[20 : 05] Having that patience, right? Instead of doing that, having that patience, being inviting, instead of being bitter. And this is maybe, this is also a really tricky one. Because I think so often we want to present ourselves, you know, as spiritually good.

You know, we're all, like, not that, oh, we're perfect, but like, oh, you know, we're kind of, like, put together, right? Sometimes you go to church, people ask, like, how are you doing? You say, good, you know, and that's kind of, like, how the conversation goes.

But it's like, yeah, it's super easy, right? Just to, like, have that facade and just say, okay, you know, things are going okay. And you know what? Sometimes you are doing good. That's totally cool. But I think a lot of times also, and I think we're all going to get there, we're going to experience that one way or another.

It's like, we're just spiritually dry. Right? We feel like, oh, okay, I've been, like, pouring out, or work has been so hard, and I just feel like disconnected from God. I feel like, okay, I haven't been reading my Bible for, like, three weeks.

It's like, yeah, things are tough. And I think the temptation is just to stay at things are tough, but also, like, okay, I'll deal with this alone, right? I think in Chinese, we say, oh, we don't want to bother other people with our problems.

[21 : 14] But I think here, what Paul is also saying, it's like, hey, let's not lie to each other, right? Let's actually just be honest. Hey, where are we at right now? And the really cool thing is, you know, Jesus didn't come for the healthy, right?

He came for the sick. And the church isn't a place actually full of super healthy people. The church is actually a hospital of people who are just working out their faith. Doesn't that, like, a beautiful imagery of what the church is like?

Wouldn't that be amazing if, like, we're all doing all this? You know, we're all changing. You know, we're all, like, trying to figure out what does it mean to be an apprentice to Jesus in the 21st century? You know, working out their faith, being vulnerable, speaking truth and love, even though, like, there will be setbacks.

Like, we're all going to keep growing that way. Now, if all of that sounds hard, it's because it is, it is hard, right? It's just like going to the gym. You know, you don't start off like the rock.

Or it's like, you know, behavior change is hard. And loving is also actually hard, right? We feel like sometimes we're in this comfort zone and it's, yeah, it's just nicer to stay in this comfort area without going out.

[22 : 23] We feel like, you know, when we love other people, you know, you send a text like, hey, you know, how's it going? Other people don't respond. You're like, oh, okay, fine. I don't know what's going on. But a lot of people don't love back the same way that you might love other people, right?

And it feels like, oh, you know what? It's just easier not to like, take that extra step and like, ask how they're doing. And I think opening up also means, you know, loving other people also means caring. And that means you're also going to have a chance of being disappointed, right?

Whether that's, you know, CG drama. I remember, yeah, that's, I mean, ask around, this definitely happened. People saying hurtful things to each other in CG are like, you know, you speak truth and love but then people just like, respond like, horribly.

And, yeah, loving also just means like, interruption, right? It's like, you have this well-laid weekend plan but suddenly, like, someone has an issue and then, okay, you need to cancel those plans or you need to like, spend less time going hiking and just like, spending that time with that person because there is like, some sort of crisis happening.

And, sometimes we have this like, mental bank account in our heads where we're like, okay, we're like, keeping score a little bit of like, how we love and, you know, we always, you know, whenever we give love, you know, we withdraw but then we always want to receive it back, right?

[23 : 40] We don't ever want to be like, completely empty. Like, we kind of have like a love tank or a love bank and here actually, Paul reminds us of the gospel, right? Because it's actually too hard on our own.

In verse 32, he tells us that even when our debt, our bank account of God was deeply, deeply in the negative, he forgave us and he sacrificed himself who, he who was of immeasurable worth so that our bank accounts of love can also be of immeasurable worth, right?

And so we can actually just keep on giving this love, right? Because we're drawing from this huge reservoir of love that just doesn't run out. And, you know, sometimes, yeah, we can love without being, feeling like, oh, we're going to be hurt because, you know, God calls us beloved children even though sometimes we feel like, oh, this ugly blob, this dirty blob and, like, actually, we can keep on going because he loves us as this ocean of love in Ephesians, right, which is so wide, so long, so high, and so deep.

This ocean of love that just overcomes any suffering or any disappointment that are just buckets compared to this ocean. and even for myself this week, man, it's been a hard week.

I was just, no, even I was, like, working on a sermon on Saturday. I was like, okay, Saturday, last week, I was like, okay, this is a dedicated time for a sermon. Like, okay, I'm just going to, like, sit here and just work on it and I get, like, a student who's, like, I'm in some sort of life emergency.

[25 : 13] I'm like, okay, should I reach out to that student? I was like, okay, fine, I'll talk to them. I met up with them really quickly. What I thought might be, like, an hour conversation became, like, a five-hour conversation. I was like, oh, my gosh, all right, now I'm like, or, like, you know, throughout this week, I remember just people, like, constantly dropping the ball and I'm like, okay, I have to, like, pick up their slack and then, really hard to be patient with people and, you know, even me, I was, like, super aware that my sermon was coming up about, okay, how we love people so I need to be, like, super aware, okay, how I need to love people well, right, but, man, let me tell you, I struggled, like, big time.

I struggled big time. My heart was just, like, bitter at different moments and I realized, like, man, I needed prayer. I was, like, constantly praying, like, God, like, you know, I'm, like, kind of bitter at this moment even though it was really hard that actually, you know, even though, like, man, I have to constantly, like, forgive, constantly, like, interrupt myself and, like, be patient with people, like, actually seeing that how sinful I was, you know, a reminder of actually and how much love and how much patience God had with me and how much he forgave me even when I was a jerk, when I was impatient, even when I was grumbling and, you know, living in love in the 21st century is really hard, right, in the fast-paced Hong Kong, where everything is moving really quickly but God's grace is enough.

God's grace is enough each day to give us strength, renew ourselves every day. So, friends, that is why every day we actually need to renew ourselves in this abundant love that God has for us so that we can live out as his new creations and walking in love as his children.

Let us pray. Dear Father, thank you for this time I'm able to, yeah, just read the word and talk about just how you've been working in our lives, Lord.

And Father, I just pray that every day we see just how desperate we are for your love because this world, man, just takes our attention away and it's so easy to be impatient, so easy to be unloving, so easy to be in a hurry and so easy to, yeah, withdraw, Lord.

[27 : 26] But Father, we know that your grace and your love is so wide, so big. It's like an ocean of love that we can just drown in, Lord, and everything that, yeah, comes our way, Lord, it just pales in comparison.

And Father, I just pray that every day. We're reminded that we need to make that effort, Lord. You know, our faith isn't earned, but we do require effort. And Father, I just pray that, yeah, we just work that, work out our faith and figure out what this means to live out being a Christian in the 21st century, Lord.

Let's pray that, yeah, as we come out this week that we're just continually renewed and that whatever comes up at work or in our CG, Lord, that we are just renewed in your love, renewed in your, a new identity that we can live out in ways that continue to love you and model after you, Jesus.

I pray that in Jesus' name, amen.