

Eph 4:17-24 – Put on the new self

Welcome

Thank G for worship

Continuing in our series “**Called to Belong**”

Looking at Eph 4 (called to be united as a church body, and equipping each other for ministry)

Quick Recap

- We studied what God’s vision for the church is
- Looked at how we’re reconciled to God and how that leads to us being reconciled to one another
- Looked at how meaningful church membership protects our unity as a church
- We studied how the Christian life was meant to be lived in community not isolation

Today we’ll be in Eph 4:17-24

This passage talks about how Christians are called to “put off the old self...”

And to “put on the new self...” So that we can move forward in holiness both individually and corporately

Read 4:17-24

Pray

About 4 years ago **heard** a great sermon from one of the campus pastors at the village church...

He was speaking in this sermon out of the book of James, and he was talking about transformation in the Christian life and persevering in the faith

I just want to share a brief excerpt from his sermon, as I think it will help frame our discussion for today.

He says this...

*"If we don't have a picture, or a clear vision of where God is taking us, then we will struggle (**in persevering in the faith**). We will fall. We will drift. We will not finish the race. James reveals to us what actually changes and motivates people, **what actually transforms character, is beauty**. You don't start with rules. You don't start with details.*

You start with beauty, and you start with an attractive vision or a narrative of what is to be.

*This is a truth that we see even outside of the spiritual realm. For example, if you want to really give a child a vision of playing the violin well, you're not going to start with the rules and the technicalities of playing violin, **no**, instead you're going to take her to a concert and let her watch a **master violinist** so that she can catch a vision for what playing the violin is and for what it could be. None of us would start by saying, "Well, this is what the rules are. Let's just walk through this. Let me just tell you all the details about it"? Of course we wouldn't do that...*

*And it's not either/or. You have to eventually get to the rules, but if you really want something that's going to compel that little girl when her hands get tired and her fingers are sore, what is it that she needs? She is going to need something more than a rulebook. She is going to **need a vision, a beautiful, compelling vision**, that in the midst of that trial, in the midst of that weariness, in the midst of that discouragement, or even failure, is **going to compel her to persevere** because she has beautiful a vision of what could be if she perseveres in her practice. It's the same way for us in Christ. Rules don't transform. Only beauty leads to transformation."*

Pause

It is tempting to look at a passage like Eph 4:17-24 and to read it off in isolation as a list of do's and don'ts

- I gotta put off the old self
- Gotta be renewed
- Put on the new self
- Be holy, righteous...

Gotta make the list, grit my teeth, and try real hard... **it doesn't work.**

...rules by themselves do not transform. Beauty transforms.

And so church, as we get into a topic that is essentially about Christian transformation at its core... by Growing in holiness

I want to lay a foundation for us... Before we even begin digging into the text or talking through practical stuff (which we will!)

I want to lay a foundation and the foundation is this...

That we're not going to be able to effectively put off the old self and move forward in holiness **unless** we are daily reminding and refreshing ourselves in the beautiful vision for Christian holiness that Paul presents us with in Ephesians

Cause by the time Paul gets to this passage in Eph 4, there's a lot that he assumes that you understand, that he's been building a case for since chap 1 about the Christian calling to be holy and righteous... that I want to make sure we really get!

And in an attempt to ensure that we don't fall into that error... of reading this passage in isolation

I want to bring in some context by looking back into the preceding verses in Ephesians that I think **illuminate for us** not only the need for holiness, but the beautiful vision that God has had since **before time began...** for His children to be set apart!

So, we're gonna look at 4 truths regarding...

God's vision for a holy people

Read 1:3-4

Truth #1

Since before the foundation of the world God appointed that we would be holy and blameless

The Lord desires for His children to know that since before time, He chose and appointed that they would walk in holiness and be blameless.

Now we see this language all over the New Testament about how God's children are called, elected, chosen... and we see that language again here, we're **chosen** for holiness

And what's so important about this language is how it relates to our Christian identity in this sense that...

It reminds us of the certainty of God's promise to make us holy and blameless in Him. Pause

And the Lord does this... b/c He knows that there will be so many times in our Christian walk when we will be tempted to despair in light of our sin or we experience discouragement b/c of our weakness

And so HE gives us these reminders... these promises that help us, and that **anchor** our souls to the fact that He has promised to make us Holy and blameless.

We know that He already views us as Holy through Christ...

But in addition... He's gonna redeem our broken lives, make you more like Jesus... and bring life to your mortal bodies (rom 6)

So the first thing Paul wants us to see is that holiness is something that is promised and assured for those who've placed their faith in Christ. You can bank on it!

Since before the foundation of the world, God appointed that we would be holy and blameless

Read 2:10

Truth #2

We are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand

So right off the bat, we again see the language rei-iterated of how God in advance has prepared us to walk in good works.

But now he adds on to it...

And we see that God's people are not the ones who make themselves holy, but it's Christ doing a work in us. We are His workmanship. We aren't our own workmanship.

That's an important distinction!

Going back to what we said earlier... making the list, trying harder in our own strength.

The Lord knew that would be our natural inclination...

So, because of our sin nature... instead of confessing our need for the Lord, we say "I got this God, I don't need You..."

That's why He has to say it so many times through Paul in Ephesians, and even throughout the New testament, that He is the one doing the work in us...

He's steering the ship, He's in control... we are **His** workmanship!

So when we read the command in Eph 4 to be holy, and to walk in righteousness, instead of that being a burden on us...

We can take heart, because we understand that God's vision for holiness in our lives has always been about the work that He does in us.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand

Read 3:8-10

Truth #3 (regarding God's vision for a holy people)

God makes His church holy, so that His wisdom might be displayed

Man I love this one!

v. 10

"so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known"

So this fits really well with what Paul's been saying in Eph 4 about being unified, building one another up, equipping the body.

Paul emphasizes all of this so strongly because of this verse right here.

Paul is telling us that through you, **the Church**, the wisdom and the grace of God is going to be proclaimed to the world.

And the reality that we need to grasp here is that the more unified, and loving we are as a church...

The more that the wisdom of God is going to be proclaimed through us! **Pause**

So much of Ephesians is about the church body working together... so that people see Jesus through us! So that we function as conduits of God's grace and truth.

And that's really important, since the world operates counter to the wisdom of God!

And why we're taking so much time to walk through Ephesians 4... Because we want God to be seen through us... We want to be working properly as the Lord intended us to.

We want His wisdom to be known in the world. Cause it's a broken place.

And only He can fix it.

If we really want to see the wisdom of God proclaimed in Herndon, then we will be a holy people...

If we want to be evangelistic in sharing who God is... Then we will lock arm in arm to pursue holiness in our lives: individually and corporately!

God makes His church holy, so that His wisdom might be displayed

Read 4:1, 13

Truth #4

We walk in a worthy manner... so that we attain unity and maturity in our faith

God's vision for a holy people is that we would be continually maturing and moving forward in our faith... never remaining stagnant but constantly discovering more of who He is, His plan and purposes for our lives and how He calls us to be ever increasingly unified together, helping one another to grow.

And Paul tells us why maturing is so important as it enables us to be **rooted in the sound truth of the gospel, and not being carried away with worldly doctrines, teachings, and philosophies.**

But speaking truth in love. And becoming more and more like Christ.

So we see that a significant part of God's vision for holiness is the continual maturing of His children in grace, truth and love.

A mature people will be a holy people, and a holy people will be ever maturing in their faith... the two necessarily reinforce one another.

We walk in a worthy manner... so that we attain unity and maturity in our faith

And so Paul sets up all of this framework regarding **God's vision for His people to be Holy** in the chapters preceding our passage today. So that by the time we reach v. 17-24 Paul just assumes that you understand that... (re summarize points)

- Holiness is something that God ordained for His people, long before we were born
- That we are His workmanship, and that He is the one empowering
- That God uses a holy and a maturing church body to declare His wisdom and His truth

Paul assumes we know all of this and that we recognize the importance and the necessity of Christian holiness.

And so church this is the beautiful vision that God has for His people to be holy and set apart...

This is the beautiful vision that we're given to remember...

...when walking in holiness is hard, or when it goes against what culture is telling us to do.

And so now in light of that we see so much more of the motivation behind Paul's exhortation to live holy lives, as Christians...

We see that this isn't just a stale, arbitrary list of commands... but that the call to holiness both individually and as a church is the purpose of our very existence as the Lord uses it to proclaim to the world the infinite holiness of God and His kindness in that He would redeem and make us holy as He is Holy.

Pause

So we arrive at our text for today.

And I want us to read it now **in light of that context** in Ephesians.

And in light of the awesome vision that God has for His people to be holy.

So let's jump in.

And one thing to note in this passage is that Paul is drawing a stark comparison between those who walk according to the world's standard, and those who walk according to God's standard (Christians). Paul wants us to see the difference between the two.

Read v. 17-19

So just a few observations...

-Talks about how the Gentiles (meaning unbelievers) are darkened in their understanding in futility of thinking...

Well we know that's not true of us b/c we now have the wisdom of God that isn't just settling in our hearts and minds and transforming us individually...

...but it's moving through us to declare the wisdom of God outside of our lives to others (Eph 3:10).

So we're not still walking in darkness and without understanding. God's moving in us, He's teaching us. His Spirit in us is testifying of who Christ is (John 15:26).

-We see also from this passage about how **the world** is callous, they've given themselves up to sensuality, to greediness and to every kind of impurity

And we know that this also isn't what we identify anymore with b/c as we saw in 4:1-13... **we're growing in our ability to walk in a manner that is worthy**. And so, we are now ever increasingly pursuing maturity in the faith.

Which just results in holy living.

****And just a quick disclaimer****

Paul is writing this to these people, because the Ephesians still struggled with these things. Otherwise if they didn't and they were doing great, we wouldn't have this text!

But he's reminding them, as we must be constantly reminded, that even though we still struggle... this isn't what we're identified with anymore!

We've been changed and we are being transformed now into a new way of living and operating... that is in line with what God intended for humanity from the beginning.

So Paul wants us to see that this is not how we operate anymore... this is how the world thinks and operates...

We now identify with Christ. And so we are being moved progressively from this old way of living, to a new life.

Read v. 20

And so this is a great summarizing statement that affirms what we just looked at. Basically saying, in light of all that junk in 17-19, *"This is not the way you learned Christ"*

NIV basically says *"This is not the way of living that you've been taught by Christ."* So don't live like that... it's a lie.

And He's reminding b/c we forget so easily!

Read v. 21

So v. 21 functions really as a transition point in the argument Paul is making.

He's saying... I'm assuming that you've heard the truth, you know what truth is, you know what Jesus taught. **And so now...** that truth, **impressing upon us**, it demands a response... we can't just stay neutral now! We can't just continue in sin... that's not our identity anymore, not who we are!

We know who we are now, and that's not it (v. 17-19). The former way of living according to the world's standard is not truth.

We know our identity, it has been laid claim over our lives that we will be blameless b/c our King is blameless.

That's not us... we can't stay there. We're called to something so much better.

Read v. 22

Man I love Paul here in v. 22. "put off your **old** self, which belongs to your **former** manner of life"

So he's saying that's not you anymore. That's your **old** life, that's your **former** manner of living. It's dead, it's gone!

You are a new creation! You have a new identity!

And you still struggle, for sure... but the Lord is moving us, in a new direction. To a new way of living. I view you as holy, through Jesus, and I'm making you more holy. More like myself. Let me take you there.

Read v. 23-24

I love verse 23... because it communicates to us, **that we now have access to a totally different mindset** from our former way of thinking.

And it's so cool just to see this work that the Lord does of renewing our minds and our hearts.

Personal example: taking more joy from others joy and serving.

And it really is just crazy to see the Lord slowly doing this overhaul in my thinking of where I am deriving pleasure and joy from.

And it's awesome because it seems like it's slowly beginning to shift from Nick's joy being rooted primarily in Nick's pleasure to Nick's joy now being rooted in others joy and pleasure and serving.

And I'm still tasting the first fruits of it now, but it is awesome.

And it gets me excited for what the Lord is going to keep doing.

Watching the Lord do this work of renewing our minds is astounding.

So we're being renewed, we're putting on the new self...

Which is...

v. 24... Created after the likeness of God...

So this renewed way of thinking that we see coming out of this new identity (for me looks like not being self-focused but being others focused) reveals more about who God is. Because it says in black and white, that this renewed way of living is **created after the likeness of God**.

So in seeing this at work in our lives, we grow to understand more of what God is like.

And how awesome is it knowing that we serve a God who gets pleasure from loving, and serving others, and who is committed to the joy of His creation.

And this is a-whole-other conversation but one of my favorite things that I've learned in seminary was from my class on the Trinity, and learning how each member of the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit), really exists to serve the others

And how we see from scripture, and really the Gospels because Jesus just comes in and blows up **in an awesome way** the understanding of who God was at the time in talking about He related to the Father and the Spirit, It's awesome.

But Jesus and scripture reveals to us how the members of the trinity are always about serving one another. And in love, deferring to each other's authority.

And further still we see how this self-sacrificing Trinitarian love extends from the Godhead to us...

John 10:10 – Jesus says I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.

John 15:11 – I have told you these things that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. **Pause**

How can you not want to **walk in holiness after hearing this?! And after seeing that this is what our God is like. He's a king but a servant, He's committed to the joy of his creation. He's incredible!**

Pause.

We are called to put on the new man, which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So I hope walking through our text with that context in mind of God's vision for His people to be holy, has been helpful.

And that that context better illuminates the **joy** and **privilege** that it is to grow in holiness and righteousness as a church.

Pause

And as we wrap up, we talked a lot about Christ doing the work in us, we are His workmanship! It's tempting to ask the question, what does that actually mean?

How is it that God is actually doing the work in us?

And so I want us to very quickly look at 3 things that I think if we pursue these...

It will put us in a position for the Lord to ever increasingly take over our lives and enable us to move forward in holiness and maturity.

So first...

1. Walking in holiness starts with prayer

It starts with pleading for God to do a work in us, and this is a model that we always see in scriptures.

Every time we see the Lord do any significant work in the Bible, it is always preceded by someone coming to God in humility, asking the Lord to do a work.

I couldn't help but think of David in Psalm 51 after his sin with Bathsheba.

He prayed *"create in me a clean heart Oh God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

We tend to view the men and women of the bible as these A+ believers who were always perfectly obedient... and it's just not true.

David didn't just go wake up in the morning, eat his Wheaties and crush it... no in light of his sin, he came and wept at God's feet... begging the Lord to change him and to do a work in his life.

If we're faithful posture ourselves before Him in humility, He's faithful to show up and enable us to walk in holiness.

But we must make prayer a priority in our lives.

2. Walking in holiness starts with intentionality

The old self is inherently deceptive... which we can all testify to based on the damage that sin has wrought on all of our lives in various ways and as evidenced by the baggage that we all have...

So putting off the old self must be dealt with **intentionally**.

Renewing your mind (or your thinking) is very hard.

So as Christians, we should come up with a plan, set boundaries, and sometimes take hard/unpopular steps to see holiness encouraged in our lives.

We should put ourselves in environments that encourage us to walk in further holiness.

In Matt 5, Jesus says if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

And the principle we take away from that word picture is to remove the impulse. Remove the thing in your life that causes you to sin, to doubt, to fear...

The thing that hinders you from walking in holiness!

And even though it's hard, we labor in this because we know it's worth it.

We have seen God's beautiful vision for a holy people. And it's worth fighting for and intentionally pursuing.

3. Walking in holiness happens in community

This is why we emphasize Community Groups and other different community building meetings and events in our church, b/c one of the primary ways that we grow is in the context of community.

It's not an accident that 2 of the major themes of Ephesians are **holiness** and **building up the church body**. All of the commands Paul gives to the church about holiness are within the context of community... not isolation.

Paul knows that these two areas are linked and that **holiness in the body is achieved most explicitly within the context of community**.

This is also why we've been emphasizing membership so hard is because it allows us to hold one another accountable to the standard that the Lord sets for His children.

So if you're not involved in a CG, or involved in the life of our church, get involved... we want to help you grow!

Walking in holiness happens in community

And what I love about these practical takeaways is how they start and end with Him. Again, it's not us doing the work!

We have a role to play for sure... but it starts in prayer (us coming to Him in humility; all we bring is our need).

And then it ends with Him empowering the church body to minister to one another on His behalf...

In closing... I want you guys to see the joy and the privilege it is to walk in maturity and to fight for holiness in our lives.

I want us to keep the beauty of the gospel, and the call on our lives to be holy (because that leads to effective mission)... I just want that to be in the forefront of our thinking, cause that's what is going to sustain us.

And then we've gotta come to Him in prayer, we've have to be intentional and make a plan, and we must lock arm in arm, and resolve to do this together... (even though life in community can be hard and stretching)...

...b/c we were never meant to do it alone.

Let's do the work, let's get it done, and let's rest in Him as He works in and through us for His glory.

I love you guys, let me pray for us.