

We've been working our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and over the last 6 weeks, our messages have had titles like:

- God chooses us, that we might choose Him.
- Sealed by the Holy Spirit
- In Christ we are reconciled to God and to each other and we are integral to his purposes.
- We are all ministers, by the grace and power of God
- Then we talked about Love and power, and how the source of power is love.
- And the last message was growing up in Christ.

And without having a bit of this background, it would be really hard to teach on today's topic, because in his letter, Paul has been building our understanding – he's been laying the foundations – he's been doing the ground work for everything that is to follow. He's been revealing to us just what our identity is in Christ, and how our identity has changed from who we were, before we were saved.

And I hope, when you read the Bible, you don't just pick out a verse or a sentence, or even one paragraph, without reading around it, to see what God is saying to us, in the overall message.

So, if we were look at the first couple of verses of today's reading, it says: ¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of **their** minds. ¹⁸ **They** are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to **their**

hardness of heart. ¹⁹ **They** have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

And if we were to just come cold into this letter, and start reading it right here, well what's it talking about? Well he's obviously talking about **those** gentiles – those **other** people – they're **way** off from God, and we're **nothing** like them, are we???.....

But the gentiles are not “those **other** people” off over there – The Gentiles are the Ephesians (the one's he's writing to), and the gentiles are us.

Back in chapter 2, he referred to the **Ephesians** as “**you gentiles**”ⁱ” Now, what is a gentile? We covered this, I think our second week into Ephesians: A gentile is someone who is not one of the people of Israel. You see, before Christ, if you weren't one of God's chosen people, you were a Gentile. If you weren't one of the children of Israel, you had no hope of having any kind of relationship with God. (And the Ephesians weren't Jews, and neither are most of us)...

And 6 weeks ago, we were studying chapter 2, and how In Christ, even we who **are** gentiles, become reconciled to God and to each other and we are integral to God's purposes.... Something amazing has changed in our relationship with God...

We once **used** to be alienated from God, we **were** separated from Christ, we **were** without hope, and without God.... Basically what he said, was we were God-forsaken and good-for-nothing.... But there has been a radical shift in our

position with God.... – In Christ, **everything's** changed. We **were** God-forsaken and good-for-nothing, but now in Christ, we've been brought near to God. In Christ, we are no longer God-forsaken – we are **filled** with God, by His Holy Spirit. In Christ, we are no longer without hope – we're **filled** with hope. In Christ, we are no **longer** good-for-nothing, because in Christ, we become **integral** for God's purposes... Now, that's a radical shift....

I'm going to leave it at that – if you missed that message on being brought near to God, you probably need to hear it. Or maybe you might've forgotten it, and need to hear it again. It's available at www.brump.net/bushdisciples, or just ask me for a copy...

So, there's been a massive shift. Back in chapter 2, he referred to them and (by extension), to us, as “**you** gentiles”... But now he's talking about “**those** gentiles”... We once were gentiles – we once **used** to be excluded from God, but now, through the blood of Christ, we are not excluded any longer... We once were people of the world, but not any longer....

2 weeks ago, we built on this theme – to live out the holy calling that we've been called to, and we're continuing with that today.... With a great position, comes a great responsibility.

The title of **today's** message, is: *Transformed, and living as the transformed creatures that we are.*

When I was an Ag College Student, they used to give us a little taste of all of the different industries. My least favourite job, was working in the piggery.... It wasn't so much “working in

the piggery”, as much as the piggery, or the stench of the piggery, coming with me, whenever I left the piggery....

When you left the piggery, you’d take your overalls off, and hang them up outside the dorm, and whenever you’d walk past, you’d smell it... but the smell would even go through your overalls, and into the other clothes that you wore... At the dining room, there was one table, segregated away from everyone else, with an A2 sized poster of a very contented looking pig, munching away on its tucker... And you guessed it – if you were on pigs, that’s where you had to eat...

Anyway, you’d come home late in the afternoon, have a shower, and get into fresh, clean clothes, and finally, you’d smell more like a human. And at tea time, you could sit with your mates – you didn’t have to sit over under the pig... And in the morning, you’d put on clean work clothes, go over for breakfast, and you could sit with your mates again.... But the worst part of the day, was being in your nice clean clothes, and putting those stinky overalls back on again....

It was wrong. It was ugly. And as soon as you did it, your clean clothes, had the stench of pigs on them again....

Paul tells us, that the truth in Christ, is that “in Christ”, we put off our “old self”, and we put on our “new self”.... That’s the true gospel. If the gospel that was preached to you, was “come to Christ as you are, and stay as you are” – that’s not the true gospel. If you have never been challenged, that to be born again, involves repentance as well as faith, then you’ve never been challenged by the true gospel.

To me, this is one of the great blessings of being a Christian... We take off the old self – the self which – well really, unless you hate your old self – unless you despise the old sinful nature, you're not ready to become a disciple of Christ... And we take off our old self – we call that “repentance” – we turn away from it, and we turn toward Christ... And Christ gives us a brand new, holy life.... The rot sets in though, when we're too in love with our old life, to give it up... And so often, we have to get to a point of absolute brokenness, before we can recognise the futility of our old life, and just how good it is, to be rid of it...

The old self, has a futility of mind – if Christ isn't at the centre of your thinking – if Christ isn't at the centre of your program – life is ultimately futile. Our whole world system – financial striving (you know, working and working, all our lives to have stuff, and then when we die, we can't take any of it with us); striving for health and fitness; searching for meaning in life; building an empire; even the quest for family happiness and relational bliss,..... is futile, if Christ does not factor into your thinking, or more properly, if Christ is not central to your thinking...

All of these things fade away – they do not have any eternal value. The quest for worldly pleasures and satisfaction and accomplishments, is futile...

- The old self has a darkened understanding – that means you just don't get it – no matter how much the truth stares you in the face, you don't get it;
- The old self is alienated from the life of God;
- The old self, is hard-hearted towards God, and so leads to ignorance;

- And this ignorance leads then, to all sorts of delusions. And so the old self seeks satisfaction where no satisfaction can ultimately be found.
- The old self becomes callous (that means to lose all sensitivity – it becomes hardened against God) – it becomes hardened against the activity of God in your life, where He's wanting to transform you.
- The old self, gives itself up to sensuality, impurity – actually the old self has an insatiable appetite for trying out all kinds of impurities, and yet it's never satisfied....

Thank God for the New self, hey....

Paul says: ^{v17} Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the *Gentiles* do... He's insisting on it... He says that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now, if Paul is saying this – if Paul is insisting on this; if Paul is using the full weight of His authority as an apostle of the Lord, to command this,,,,,,, well that tells me something.... That tells me, it's possible, for someone who has begun to

follow Christ – for someone who has left their old life behind, to take it up again....

It's like taking off that dirty, stinky pair of piggy overalls, and putting them on again, after I've had a bath....

I sometimes find myself doing that in my Christian life... don't you??? We know that Christ has given us this new way of living – we've repented – we've left our old life – we've taken off our old self.... But then some of the old self – well, he begins to creep back in, doesn't he (or she)....

Our hearts **used** to be soft and teachable – God's word used to mould us and shape us, but then we begin to harden against Him... Pride creeps in; arrogance gets ahold; impure thoughts appear; and instead of chasing them away, we yield to them, and we let them develop into impure actions; ... And we begin to blend in with the world again....

- Swearing, or maybe coarse joking...
- Unforgiveness
- Gossip
- Corrupting talk (Do you know what corrupting talk is??? It's unnecessary; or untrue; or unkind comments, that do nothing **for** the body of Christ, and everything to destroy it.
- Bitterness
- Wrath
- Anger - Paul actually lists here, anger in all its forms, from an inner, resentful attitude, to an indignant outburst, to a seething rage, to a full-on public shouting match, to abusive language and cursingⁱⁱ

And if any of that stuff starts making an appearance in your life, well that's the old self coming back again...

And Paul commands – the apostle Paul insists in the Lord – with all of the authority of God, not to go back to our old life... Instead, he shows us the positive, of what God **does** want to do in our lives

^{v23} to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
What does that mean?

*We're actually doing a few renovations in the house now. And during the week, the painter was doing all of his preparation, and a fair bit of plastering had to be done. And I was doing a bit of work in there as well... Now, he was putting on patches and layers of plaster, and sanding it back... - it took him days... but I could see that he was making a difference... But I was **also** very aware, that what **I** was doing, could have a **major** impact on the outcome of his job. For instance, he'd patched a whole heap of holes that were up in the ceiling, where old air cooler vents had been... And I had work I had to do in the ceiling. And if I'd put any weight on any of those areas that he'd done, I would've just destroyed everything that he was doing.*

Likewise, inside, he was patching holes in walls, fixing them, painting them – making them nice. And if I'd started swinging ladders around and punching more holes in the walls, he wouldn't have been too happy, would he? Imagine that he's doing this beautiful job, and I come along and destroy it.... I think my painter/plasterer is going to be grieved....

Gavin the painter, was doing the transformation, but I had to work with him, and not do stuff to grieve him...

V30 says: do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. God is the one who transformations our lives. I'm certainly not transformed by my own efforts – no matter how good they might be.... God gives us the strength, to live the new life, to which we are called....

So, what part do **we** play???... If my life's all going to putty, is that God's fault? Or is it mine? If my old self is pretending to be like the Rolling Stones and making yet another comeback tour, is that God's doing, or is it mine???

Some people will tell you that we have **no** part to play in any of this – that our sanctification is all entirely up to God – But, I cannot reconcile that logic, with the literally hundreds of commandments given by both Christ and the apostles, where we are told to do something (or not do something) to increase our righteousness... – Biblically, I cannot get around the fact, that we **do** have a part to play.

Firstly, we have to eagerly desire God and His holiness, and secondly, we have to work **with** God in the transformation that He wants to do in us.

I'd be bold enough to say, that if you have a righteousness problem, you have a love problem. If you truly love God – if you truly love His holiness – if you truly understand that

Christ died on the cross to rid you **of** your old self – well you're going to want to be rid of that old self too. If you love God, you will eagerly desire God to do His transformational work.

And we are **not** simply passive recipients of this new self, given by God... We must work **with** God, and not against Him. *Just like that painter/plasterer was doing the work, but I had to work with him and not against him.* When we don't work with the Holy Spirit, we grieve the Holy Spirit....

When I see those old traits of the old Michael, raising his ugly head, I know 2 things – it's a sure sign that my relationship with God isn't going so well, and I also know I'm grieving the Holy Spirit... If I love God, I don't want to grieve His Holy Spirit.

So, what do we do?

If you recognise the old self, coming back again... Or more commonly, others will notice it before you accept it.... If we see the old self coming back again, what do we do?

Firstly, we have to accept it – we have to accept that this is **not the way that we learned in Christ**. Give up your self-justification. Give up the excuses. Just as an alcoholic cannot begin his recovery, until he accepts that he is an alcoholic, We cannot begin to put on the new self, until we accept that holding on to the old self, is **not the way that we learned in Christ**.

Secondly, we must repent. Just as we had to repent of our sins, when we began to follow Christ, in those times when the

old self makes a re-appearance, we need to repent of whatever sins are sneaking back in.

Thirdly, we put on the **new** self. ... How do we do that? It's easily said, but how's it done?

Well, it all begins in the mind. The old self draws its life from the futility and corruptibility of our old mindset... But we are **renewed, in the spirit of our minds...**

Now, that's something we can't do – God does that. As we turn our thoughts, and our hearts towards God, God renews the spirit of our minds.

There is a daily battle that takes place in your mind, and it takes place in mine too. It's a battle for how we use our minds...

When I used to use a windows operating system on the computer, I used to find that every 12 months, no matter how much care I took to make sure I didn't load my computer up with too much stuff, or viruses, or whatever... I used to find that within 12 months, the computer would slow right down. It'd load itself up with all these behind-the-scenes processes, that I didn't know what they did, and the whole thing would just slow down, and become corrupt.

And I used to find that pretty much every 12 months, I'd have to back up all my important files, and completely format the hard drive, and do a fresh install, all over again, and it'd be just like having a new computer, all over again...

There was a daily battle in that operating system – stuff taking over, and corrupting it...

Well, our minds have a daily battle that we face. And when you're **close** to God, and you fill your **mind** up with God – the Holy Spirit has open-slatheer to do His wonderful work. And the **new** self, created after the likeness of God, comes out, in true righteousness and Holiness.

When we fill our minds up, with what is good, and pure and holy – that's when the new self takes on life.

But when we fill our minds up with junk... that's when the corruption sets in.

The spirit of our minds is renewed, as **we** renew our relationship with God.

As we soften our hearts towards God. As we pray, and read the scriptures, and not just reading the Scriptures, but meditating on God's word, and letting it cut, and change and renew us.... Loving God. Worshipping God. Loving Others... Forgiving others, just as Christ forgave us.

As we renew our relationship with God, the Lord renews the Spirit of our minds.... And we **put on the new self**. The new self, who has been **created after the likeness of God**. True righteousness. True holiness – there's nothing fake about it... We don't pretend to be righteous – we **are** righteous... Because God does transform us – trust me in that... There's hope for you, and there's hope for me, because

if there's one thing God loves to do, that's the creation of holiness.

Let's pray,
Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love.
We thank you for your patience.
We thank you for the new self you give us –
A self of purity and holiness.
A new self of righteousness and love.

But Lord, sometimes we've loved our old self too much.
The old self, who gives us permission to hold on to anger;
The old self of unforgiveness
The old self of gossip or slander,
Or impurity or violence.

We have hardened ourselves against you.
There's areas of our lives that we've set as "off limits".
God, Forgive us.

Lord, renew your righteousness in us.
Lord, deepen our relationship with You.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
And give us your life or righteousness and peace and truth.

Transform us,
And help us to live as the transformed creatures that we are.

Amen.

ⁱ Ephesians 2:11

ⁱⁱ O'Brien PT. Pillar New Testament commentary – Ephesians p.349