

Seeking Change

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[0 : 00] And let's read together. We're going to read a passage from the New Testament, from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17 to 24. A very famous moment in Paul's letter.

And so this is God's word to us today. 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.

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. They have become callous. They've given themselves up to sensuality and greed, to practice every kind of impurity.

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

Amen. This is God's holy word. In verse 17 here, just to look at this passage for a few minutes with you, in verse 17, Paul says this command, Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles do.

[1 : 28] And just before that, he says, Now this I say and I testify to the Lord. Now when he says, I testify to the Lord, it's a way, it's a phrase he uses to say, I speak right now with the authority of God.

So the commands I'm about to give you are the very word of God. I speak with the authority of the Lord. Do not walk as the Gentiles do in darkness. Now what does he mean by that?

By the word Gentile, Gentile sometimes in the Bible is used for anybody that's not Jewish. But here that's not what he means, not at all. He's talking to the Ephesians in Ephesus, and there in Ephesus there is a grand temple, very famous, the Temple of Artemis.

And at the Temple of Artemis, it's the organizing principle of the whole city of Ephesus. And people go there day in and day out to worship all the gods, and they do so in all kinds of practices.

And it's known as a city where people worship the gods and live in any way that they want to live. So it was known as a party city, a place of a lot of darkness at times. And Paul says, if you've become a Christian, if you've experienced the grace of Jesus in your life, if God has brought light through the cross and resurrection of Christ to you, if you believe in Jesus, don't live that life anymore.

[2 : 47] Don't walk in the way the city teaches you to walk. Put away the normal patterns of the culture. In other words, the word Gentile there just means the normal patterns and assumptions of the default culture of sinful humanity.

It just means that by default, we're all carried into the patterns of our culture. And he said, but put that away. You've become a Christian. Your life has been changed. That's what he says.

Now, that means, he's talking about something very important on New Year's Day. Verse 15, just before this, we didn't read this. He says, grow up in every way into him like Jesus.

And so he says, he says, the goal, the goal of life, grow up in every way like Jesus Christ. Put away the normal patterns and assumptions of the culture around you.

Now, what is Paul talking about there? He's talking about change. He's talking about deep change in your life. Put away the normal patterns that the culture teaches you, and instead, put on, become like Christ.

[3 : 49] Deep change. That is what every single person on January 1st, 2025 wants. We want change this year. We want to be different. We want this year to be better than last year.

Of course, always. Every new year, we want that. And I was reading this week an article about change and about the industries that make the most money in January every single year.

Some of them you will absolutely expect, right? So, of course, who profits most from January 1st? Deep desire to change. Gym memberships, obviously, are always the number one.

Book sales increase immensely in January. Counseling and therapy clinics and centers go up by at least 15% on average in the UK and the States by the stats I read in January.

The unexpected were not surprising, but I hadn't thought about financial advisors, budgeting apps. After Christmas, you've got to get a budgeting app.

[4 : 50] And lastly, language learning software, Babel, Duolingo. Duolingo makes almost all of its money from January subscriptions. Why? Because we want to change.

Every single person wants to change. Paul tells you here, let me just give you three things about change here for this year, very briefly, that Paul says. First, he says that Christianity actually can provide for you the goal of change, a real goal, something to actually change into.

And so, he says in verse 15, grow up in every way into the maturity of becoming like Jesus. And then he says, and put away the patterns of darkness that the culture teaches you. What does he mean by that?

I can only give you one thing he means by it today. Verse 19. In verse 19, he says, the Gentiles have given themselves, the normal culture has given itself up to sensuality, greed, and to practice every kind of impurity.

Now, what does he say? What does he say? Giving yourself over. This is Paul's special way of saying, it is the normal default pattern of every culture, because of our human disposition towards sin and rebellion against God, to love and to get addicted to things in this life more than we love God.

[6 : 04] He says, they've given themselves over. And it means that the normal pattern of culture in Ephesus and in Edinburgh in 2024 is to love, what does he list? Greed and sensuality, sexuality, lust, money, bank account, success, every type of thing you can get your hands on in this life, to make something of yourself, to find meaning in this life.

He says, the normal default position of human beings is that we will chase anything we can in this life to make something of ourselves. That real change, most people are seeking change in 2025.

And what change is that? They want to make more money. They want to be more successful. They want to get a hold of their career. They want to have more relationships, better relationships. And he says, that's actually the default pattern, the sense that the most important things in our lives is money, bank account, wealth, success.

And he says, but no, that's thinking in darkness. It's not walking in the true light. What does he say? Verse 15, every single human being is made with one ultimate goal.

It is what we really want. It is the change that we really need. And that is to make this year about becoming more like Jesus. That the thing that we really need, no matter what the circumstances are, no matter bank account, no matter success or failure in your career, is to become more like Christ.

[7 : 28] That's the true goal, the true resolution, the ultimate resolution, is to become more and more like Christ this year. It's, I think, pretty common today in therapy, counseling, the books that will be purchased in January, even maybe through a friend, that it's pretty easy for us to identify the problems that we struggle with in our lives.

You can go to counseling. You can go to therapy. You can pick up a lot of really good books at Blackwell's and Waterstones. And they will help you realize that maybe you struggle with greed.

Maybe you struggle with careerism. You're too dedicated to it. Maybe you struggle with relationship after relationship after relationship. You chase and you chase and you chase. The modern world has gotten pretty good at identifying the problems.

It's not too hard to see. Your friend can tell you if you don't know what your big problem is. But then who should you become? You know, you can go and get all these really good helps to identify the problems that you have deep down in your life, in your soul, that everybody else around you maybe can see already.

But then the question is left, okay, you've put away greed, but now what? What's the goal? Who should you become? And Christianity comes and says there is one supreme goal in this life, and it's to become more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ Himself.

[8 : 54] Will you think about this? Will you make 2025 a year where you say, I want to experience more and more the wisdom of Jesus Christ in my life?

I want to experience more and more the courage of Christ, the insight, the passion, the zeal for life and ministry that He had, the compassion for people.

I want this year to be a year where I'll become more patient, more loving, more faithful, more gentle, more meek, more mild, more strong, courageous like He was.

I want to, I want above all else much more than I want to learn French on Duolingo, much more than that. I want to have the overwhelming joy that Jesus Christ has.

And Paul says in verse 15 that that is exactly what you're made for, to become more and more like Him. So second, how, the path, how can you get there, the path to change?

[9 : 54] Paul says here, very briefly, number one, let me give you two, two ways to seek this. The first is this. Paul says, be who you are this year. Be who you are. What does he mean?

He says, stop walking in the cultural addictions of the Gentiles, the normal default rhythm of the culture of Ephesus or Edinburgh. And he says, instead, that is not the way you learn Christ.

And so, down here, he turns and uses three verbs to talk about, these educational verbs to talk about the way to change. And he says, it's not the way you learn Christ.

It's not what you've heard. It's not what you've been taught. And immediately, there's a sense in which you might come and say, is Paul here talking about, well, the real path to become like Jesus? The real path to seek change in my life is education.

You know, he says, that's not the way you learned Christ. That's not the way you were taught. That's not the way you heard. I need to be educated more. I need to be more, I need to merely have more discipline and more education and I can become more and more like Christ and reach my goals.

[10 : 57] And it starts to sound like, if you go that route, like Christianity has become like every other world religion. That deep change in your life is something that you have to completely do by yourself.

It's about education. It's about discipline. It's about a path that you pursue. It's the same sense in which Islam comes and says, look, if you want to experience change in your life, there's a five-fold path, five pillars.

If the Buddha came and what did he say? He said, there's an eight-fold path to have deep change in your life, change that lasts, change that matters. And you can come today and you can have really good helps in your life, practices, cognitive behavioral therapy, all sorts of things that are very, very good.

But for a moment, it could come across and seem here like Paul is talking about some kind of pathway that you pursue of education to better yourself and to really seek to become like Jesus in your life.

And verse 22 is absolutely critical, absolutely key. What does he say in verse 22? He says, put to, you've learned this, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self.

[12 : 09] Now he says, you've got to put off your old self, you've got to put on your new self, but look, you've got to see, you've got to be really careful here and to see exactly what Paul says for just one minute. And it's this, John Stott, the great English commentator, he points this out.

He says, when you really look at these verbs, when you really look at the language that's being used here, this language, to put off your old self, look, it's not the way you learned Christ. No, put off your old self.

No, it doesn't say that. It says, to put off your old self and to put on your new self, the new self. And John Stott says this, these are past tense, middle infinitive verbs.

Right? Yeah? Past tense, middle infinitives. That's very important. Why is it so important? It's important. Okay, move on from that. It's important for this reason. Because it could be translated like this, having put off your old self and having put on your new self, be renewed.

Meaning, he's not talking about here, he's not talking here about a command. He's not saying, this year, the most important thing you can do is put off your old self and put off your new self. That's not the first thing. No. He's saying, having put off your old self and having already received the new self, renew your mind.

[13 : 26] Meaning, he's saying that when you come to Jesus Christ, the change has already happened. It's already happened. Now, the first thing that Paul says the pathway to change is this year, 2025, you've got to be who you are.

You've got to be who you are. What is he saying? You know, you look at yourself and say, but I am greedy. I am selfish. I do struggle with lusts of all kinds, loving things in this world far too much.

The old man, the old self in me is doing a lot of battle and sometimes winning. But here, Paul says, no, your old self has already been taken away. And you've got to see what he's saying.

He's saying, the first thing, when God looks at you through Jesus, because of Jesus, he sees an emerald. He sees a diamond. He sees a finished product.

He sees somebody who is beautiful in character and integrity. Why? Because when Jesus Christ went to the cross, he took on all of your injustice. This is the metaphor of clothing.

[14 : 27] He took on the clothing of your selfishness. He took on the clothing of your injustice so that you could receive his clothing, the clothing of his righteousness, so that you could be in God's sight made beautiful, pronounced beautiful, even though you're struggling, even though you aren't always.

First thing, and we'll move to the final point, Christianity is unlike every other world religion, everything on offer in the bookshelf at Waterstones.

There's nothing like it because what it says is this, the true path to change, to becoming like Christ, is to first see that when you come to faith in Jesus, God changes you. In his sight, you are pronounced clean, forgiven, beautiful, having the character of Jesus Christ himself even though it's not visible yet.

Be who you are. Lastly, that means, okay, what do you do with that? How do you really take a hold of that in your life this year? Let me get very practical and very, right here at the very end.

Okay, he says this, practice this change. All right, now that you know, if you've come to Jesus, if you have faith in your life, in God's eyes, you are already an emerald. And now you've got to practice that.

[15 : 39] And so, yes, now the command, put off your old self, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self. Paul says, how do you do that? All he means is this, first, put off the old self, now practice this, be who you are, practice it, take it up, take hold of these goods that you've been given.

Here's how you do it. First, putting off the old self simply means this, it means that when you are alone, you've got to live in the presence of God in that moment.

Putting off the old self means that in the most important moments of your life, which are the small moments, the moments, especially when you are by yourself, you've got to embrace the reality that you are living in the presence of God.

Put away the old self. That means when temptation comes, you've got to fight, fight, fight, to say in that moment, I am in the presence of the living God, and I've already been changed, and I want to live into that.

It's all about the small moments, not the big moments, the small moments. And then he says, step two, and then be renewed in the spirit of your mind. What is that? It doesn't say be renewed in the Holy Spirit of your mind.

[16 : 50] That's not the word being used here. It's be renewed in the spirit of your mind, meaning your spirit, your heart, your soul, your affections have to be renewed in that moment.

Your mind has to work hard in that moment to renew your spirit, your affections, your heart. So what do you do? First you say, in the moment of temptation, in the moment where you desire to sin, to walk away from God in darkness, you've got to first say, I've already been changed.

I'm an emerald. I want to say no to that. Put it off. Secondly, now, mind, talk to spirit, talk to your heart, talk to yourself, and say, self, you are already changed.

You've got to be who you are. It's to talk to yourself and to allow that to become prayer. And to say, Lord, I'm in your presence right now, and right now, I need strength.

I need renewal. And third step, final step, put on the new self. And what is that? It's the choice, the fight, to say today, right now, in this moment, I'm going to choose patience over impatience.

[17 : 58] I'm going to be slow to anger instead of quick to anger. I'm going to choose the affection I have for Jesus Christ, my Savior, more than my lust. It's a fight.

You already are in God's sight, the emerald. Justification, and now seek sanctification. Practice it. Become who you are. Become who you are. And let me give you two applications and we'll finish.

First is this. Deep change, fighting idols in your life, becoming like Christ this year. Boy, what is on offer here? What is on offer is a life of joy.

More and more joy, more and more glorification of God. More and more becoming like Jesus means more and more joy, deep joy, surprising joy in your life. And I just want to say that that is not exactly, that will not come to you like a gym membership brings you benefits.

So maybe you joined the gym last week to prepare for today. Whatever else it is you're seeking change in practical ways in your life this year. If you go to the gym every day, most days this month, and you eat really well, really healthily, on January 30th, you will look in the mirror and what will happen?

[19 : 10] You will see, I have changed. Maybe it's a small change, but you will notice there will be something that will have changed, right? The normal pathway to fitness. Becoming like Jesus is not like that.

It's probably not the case that you will look up on January 30th and see all the ways that you've changed, that you've become more and more the emerald, the sanctified emerald that God has pronounced that you are through justification.

Instead, probably what you need to think about is coming back here or wherever you may be in the world. On January 1st, 2026, and saying, in what ways did God change me last year?

From a person who lacked joy into a person full of joy, from a person who is very negative all the time to a person of gratitude. A person who really struggles with impatience into a person of patience.

You'll probably need to give it a year of fighting, fighting, fighting, to become more and more like Christ, to see results, to see, to visibly see. Boy, your spouse, your friend, your partner, they'll be able to tell you faster than that.

[20 : 16] But it's slow. There's a lot of patience here. Lastly, no, yes, lastly. I thought I had something else there, but I don't. Lastly, the risk.

There's a risk here on January 1st, 2025, of doing what we all struggle with so much, and that's never starting. Never starting. Not, boy, don't hear.

You are saved by grace through faith. That is why Jesus, through the cross and resurrection, God looks at you, if you're a Christian today, and says, you're already an emerald. Pronounced clean, forgiven.

And now, fight. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Fight to become the emerald in this life that you are in God's sight. That's what we're, sanctification is what we're talking about. There's a risk of never growing very much.

As a Christian. You can be a Christian and never grow very much in your life. Never really experience the depths of joy that are on offer. Jean-Paul Sartre, not a Christian, but a very famous French existentialist philosopher, he said it like this, something very true.

[21 : 20] He said, I have led a toothless life, a toothless life. I have never bitten into anything. I was waiting.

I was reserving my teeth for later on, and I've looked up and just noticed that now my teeth are gone. Now there's a real danger and real risk of always saying, tomorrow, I will fight this vice and bad habit.

Tomorrow, I will get serious about becoming more like Jesus. Tomorrow, next month, 2026 will be the year. When I leave university, that will be the time. when this move is passed, when this change in our circumstances is passed, then I'll be able to pray and read scripture and be a more patient person.

And boy, the risk is not losing God's grace. No, forgive me, that's not the risk. No, but the risk is looking up year in, year out, and saying, decades have gone by and I've not yet experienced the joy that the scriptures talk about in this life.

The change that's on offer to me of becoming more like Jesus in this life, sanctification is this, Ephesians 1, 3, you already have every spiritual blessing. Jesus has already given it in the gospel.

[22 : 33] So now, take hold of it. The final word. It would be like a starving man, a starving woman, starving to death and being gifted, totally gifted with a whole storeroom, a kitchen full of food, ready.

To eat. And someone comes to that starving man, that starving woman and says, do you have food to eat? And objectively, they have every blessing. Everything has already been given to them.

Every pronouncement has been made over them. The kitchen is full. The storehouse is full. But they're not walking in and opening the cabinet. Subjectively, they're not taking it. They're not taking hold of it. Don't starve yourself this year.

Take up and eat. Become like Jesus. Fight. Fight. Because you have already been given grace. Because you are already an emerald in his sight. Let us pray. Father, we ask that this year would be a year of deep change.

The real change we need. not merely the beautiful things of learning languages and getting fitter and reading more books and eating better or whatever it is, Lord, but the real change of being conformed to the image of the Son.

[23 : 45] Give us, Lord, a desire for the fight to put off, to mortify, to kill the habits, the sins, the vices of darkness that our city teaches us, that our selfishness calls for, and to put on the fruit of the Spirit.

So we want to be more like Jesus, Lord, because we want more joy in our lives and because it gives you glory and because we want to enjoy you forever, even in these moments now.

From one degree of glory to the other, we ask that you would grow us up in this year. And we pray that through because of the ground of your grace, not in order to get it. And we pray that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.