

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God
The New Walk of the New Self (Ephesians 4:17-5:2)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 10, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ In 1865, there were approximately 250,000 black slaves in the state of Texas. Two years earlier, Abraham Lincoln's **Emancipation Proclamation** took effect (Jan. 1, 1863) declaring all slaves to be freed in the Confederate states, against which the Union was at war.
 - ▶ But news moved slowly and it took two years before this good news reached the shores of Texas. On June 19, 1865, standing on the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa (a historic house that stands today), Union General Gordon Granger proclaimed the good news of total emancipation for all slaves in Texas.
 - If you know your Texas history, you know this is why Texans celebrate the holiday known as **Juneteenth**. That's June 19th combined. Former slaves began this tradition a year later, and it's been going strong for 150 years.

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

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

- ❖ Do you see the connection to our text? **The Apostle Paul has dedicated three chapters in Ephesians to declare and unpack a cosmic Emancipation Proclamation.** He been telling us of how in Christ, "*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*" (1:7) We were once dead in our sins, blindly following the prince of the power of the air (2:1-2). We were enslaved to spiritual forces and to our own sin. "*4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.*" (2:4-5)
 - ▶ That's the Christian's Emancipation Proclamation. And now in chapter 4, Paul shifts gears and begin to exhort us to live in light of our new found freedom. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (4:1).
 - In vv1-16 that means living as **a unified people** since we've been unified in Christ. We looked at that last week. And now in vv17 and on, Paul's calling us to live as **a changed people** since we've been changed in Christ.

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

The Necessity for Change

- ❖ Let’s begin by stressing the necessity for change in our lives, if we claim to be Christians. Notice how Paul tells his readers they must no longer walk as the Gentiles do – as unconverted unbelievers do. It’s a *must*. You must not revert back to that.
 - ▶ And look how he says in v20, “*²⁰But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him.*” So it’s fair to assume – now that you’re a Christian – that you should be walking differently. A change in your life is a safe assumption. It’s actually a necessity.
- ❖ Now I want to be clear. **I don’t want you to think you have to change your behavior before you can be saved.** I think that’s the impression a lot of non-Christians get. That you change your life around first and then come to Jesus to be saved. No, that’s not the gospel. **The gospel says you’re saved by grace through faith, not by grace through change.**
 - ▶ The gospel says God loves you in all your mess. You haven’t cleaned your life up. You haven’t turned it around. And yet he loves you still and still offers his salvation. I like how Max Lucado puts it. He says, “***God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way.***” He loves you where you’re at, but he loves you too much to leave you there. He’s going to change you. Change is inevitable.
- ❖ Because we’re new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). We’re God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (2:10). We’re made new – to no longer walk in the way of Gentiles – but to walk in good works. **So again, it’s fair to assume that Christians should be living differently now that they’re converted.** Not just in behavior but in the ways we think and feel, in the things we value.
 - ▶ That’s important to emphasize because some of us might ignore this passage because we don’t think we’re guilty of walking like an unconverted unbeliever. We tell ourselves, “I live a pretty moral life. I don’t sleep around. I don’t have a problem with alcohol or drugs. I’ve never been in trouble with the law. I’ve always been a pretty good person. I don’t really walk like the Gentiles do.”

- ❖ But notice how when Paul describes the way Gentiles walk, he doesn't start with their external behavior but with their thinking. Look at vv17-18 and notice all the phrases having to do with the mind. They walk "*in the futility of their minds . . . darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance in them.*"
 - ▶ **It has to do with your worldview (the way you think about the world you live in) and how central God is to it.** Either he doesn't exist in your worldview, or he's been pushed to the periphery. Either way, something else is central. Something else besides God is being lived for. Something else is being worshipped. That's why the unconverted are alienated from the life of God.

- ❖ **And notice how the source of all this warped thinking is the heart.** Look at the end of v18, it's "*due to their hardness of heart*". If your heart is hard towards God, if you don't trust God, then your thoughts of God will be small. He doesn't control your life. You do. He doesn't guide your conscience. You do.
 - ▶ Look at v19. You become **spiritually callous**. You can give yourself over to **sensuality** without batting an eye, without an ounce of guilt. Anything goes as long as it feels good, as long as it feels right. But nothing ever satisfies. You're left with a **greedy, insatiable appetite** for more and more kinds of impurity.

- ❖ That's what Paul has in mind by walking in the way of the Gentiles. **So how about now?** Christian, have you walked with that kind of thinking – where you're living for and worshipping something else besides God? It's an exercise in futility. Have you walked with a heart hardened towards God, callous to his Spirit, greedily indulging yourself in sin?
 - ▶ Could we be guilty of that? **If we're honest, we'd admit that sometimes we still think, feel, and behave like the unconverted.** When under pressure, we fall back into the same unhealthy patterns. We revert back to the same unholy habits.

- ❖ It makes no sense. But that's what we do. **We're like the slave who knows he's free but still, out of habit, continues to do his slavemaster's bidding.** We're like the prisoner who's been freed, who's broken shackles rest gingerly around our wrists and ankles. If we'd just get up, they'd fall off, and we could walk away into freedom. But we ignorantly remain in our cell with chains around us.

The Foundation for Change

- ❖ I agree it makes no sense. And that's the point. Paul's point is that it makes no sense for believers to continue living like non-believers. In vv25-32, he's going to tell you to stop lying, to control your anger, to not steal, to watch your mouth, to speak kindly to others, to forgive people and love them. And then in chapter 5:1 he's going to tell you to imitate God.
 - ▶ Sadly most people have the impression that this is the message of Christianity. "Don't behave that way anymore. Change your ways and start behaving like this. Behave like a Christian." But that's not the Christian message. **Becoming a Christian is not about putting off and putting on certain behaviors.**

- ❖ That's not Paul's understanding of Christianity. That's not how he taught it. That's not how he taught it to the Ephesians. Look in v20. **Here he explains the foundation for change – the reason why he expects them to live differently.** This is our second point.
 - ▶ Some of these Christians were living unchanged, undifferentiated lives, and Paul says, *"²⁰But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*
- ❖ So Paul expects change in the way they live. He expects certain behaviors. He has a whole list starting in v25, but he won't let them get there without first going through vv20-24. He's not just talking to them about putting off and putting on behaviors. He's talking about putting off your old self and putting on the new self.
 - ▶ **In other words, Paul's not going to tell them what they ought to do until he reminds them of who they actually are.** Paul doesn't go into his list of behavioral changes without first talking about the fundamental change in our identity because we're now in Christ. **That's because becoming a Christian is about being something before it's about doing something.**
- ❖ Lots of seekers are hesitant to become a Christian because their first thought is that they'll need to stop doing this or start doing that. And it sounds too hard or unappealing. But that's the wrong focus. Behavior will come into play, but that's not the pressing issue. **The pressing issue is not about changing your behavior but about being changed altogether.**
 - ▶ If you've got a sour lemon tree, it's not going to grow sweet oranges. It's branches will be filled with lemons. Now you can pick them all off and tie oranges to each branch. It might look like an orange tree for brief while. But in time, the lemons will grow back, and the tied-on oranges will rot and fall off. If you want oranges, you can't just put them onto the branches. You need to change the tree altogether at the root.
- ❖ There are some of you trying to become a Christian by putting on certain behaviors. **You're trying to change your life around by dressing up tree branches while ignoring the root.** This is the biggest mistake people make about Christianity. It's a common mistake.
 - ▶ **Christianity is not centered on morality.** But if you ask the average person on the street, "What's a Christian?", they'll say a Christian is a moral person. They don't lie. They don't steal. They don't sleep around. They go to church on Sundays. They give to the poor. A Christian is a generally good and generous person.
 - No, that's not a Christian. **A Christian is not just a moral person. A Christian is a new person.** Christianity is centered on Christ. It's about coming to Christ in faith and being utterly transformed from the inside out.

- ❖ This is the most liberating news. This is what some of you really need to hear. Because you're thinking about becoming a Christian, but you're not sure. You're thinking, "What does that mean, pastor? Does that mean I have to stop sleeping with my girlfriend or boyfriend? Will I have to get a grip on my temper? Do I have to stop cursing and stop telling lies and giving half-truths? Do I need to forgive that person who hurt me so bad?"
 - ▶ The answer is "Yes, eventually." Because all those behaviors are addressed in v25 and on. You can't ignore them. But you're going about it the wrong way. You're getting ahead of yourself. Before you get to v25, you have to go through vv22-24.
- ❖ **You have to put off and put on a new self *before* you put off and put on a new morality, a new set of behaviors.** Christianity is not about reforming and becoming a better you. It's about repenting and becoming a brand new you.
- ❖ This is how the Ephesians learned Christ. This is how they were taught. **Paul taught that to become a Christian involves a fundamental break with your former life.** You've put off that old self. You've died to it. When you were baptized into Christ, you were baptized into his death (Rom. 6:3). Your old self was crucified with him (Rom. 6:6). That's not you anymore. So don't go back to walk in that life again.
 - ▶ When you're in prison, you wear that ugly orange jumpsuit. That's prison-wear. But when you're freed, you put those clothes off and put on new ones. You're on the outside now. Why would you wear that jumpsuit again? It makes no sense. That's not who you are. You're a free man not a prisoner.

Our Responsibility in Change

- ❖ That's what Paul's trying to communicate, the foundation for change. If you want to experience real change in your life, in your behavior, in your lifestyle, if you want to see permanent, lasting change – then you need to be changed in Christ. You need to come to Jesus to be converted, to receive a new identity.
 - ▶ **If this happens, if you have this experience of conversion, you now have a responsibility in changing yourself.** This is our third point. Earlier I said becoming a Christian is about being something *before* it's about doing something. Well if you're now a new person, then you better get to doing something. You have a responsibility.
- ❖ Paul describes it in v23, "*to be renewed in the spirit of your minds*". The verb tense of *be renewed* is different from the verb tense of put off (v22) and put on (v24). Put off and put on are in the aorist tense suggesting a past action. In Colossians 3, Paul describes Christians as those who have put off the old self and have put on the new self (Col. 3:9-10). In other words, it's not something you do repeatedly every day. It happened at your conversion.
 - ▶ But "*to be renewed in the spirit of your mind*" is in a tense that suggests a continuous action. A continuous renewal process. We're to be transformed in our behavior by the daily renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). What does that mean? **It means to renew your mind by thinking daily about your new identity in Christ.** That's your responsibility when it comes to changing yourself.

- ❖ Think about this. **It would be cruel to tell a slave – before emancipation – to “Stop acting like a slave. Start living like a freedman.”** That’s not helpful. You’re just mocking them. You’re just setting them up for disappointment, for disillusionment.
 - ▶ But if they've been emancipated, then telling them, “Stop acting like a slave. Be who you are and start living like a freedman” – that’s exactly what they need to hear.

- ❖ **We need to renew our minds by recalling who we are in Christ and then living like it.** “Be who you are!” If you’re free in Christ, live like a freedman. Walk free. If you’ve been changed in Christ, walk like a changed woman.
 - ▶ Every day we have to remind ourselves – we have to remind each other – who we are. If we’re Christians, then we’re free in Christ. We’re new creations. So be who you are. **Stop living and behaving as if you’re still under the yoke of slavery.**

- ❖ “Stop it.” You can say that to a Christian. That’s not being legalistic. **That’s not asking too much. As long as you root that command to “stop it” in the foundation of the gospel, of their conversion, of who they now are in Christ.**
 - ▶ It would be asking too much, it would be cruel and legalistic, to tell a man to stop acting like a prisoner when in fact he’s still in chains, still in his cell. But if the chains are off, if the prison doors are wide open, and yet he’s still moping around in his cell, the loving thing to do is to tell him to be who you are, to act like who you are, to stop it, and walk out of there like the free person you are.

- ❖ By the way, parents, keep this in mind. We all want our kids to act like good little Christians. But that’s asking too much, that’s cruel and legalistic, if they’re not yet Christians. **We can’t expect our kids to behave like Christians if they’re still slaves to sin.** They need to hear the gospel daily. They need to be invited to trust in Jesus to free them from sin, to change them into new creations.
 - ▶ And if they are Christians, the next time you have to say “stop it”, remind them that they actually can *because* of who they are in Christ. That’s the difference between parenting through morality versus parenting through the gospel.

Our Motivation in Change

- ❖ So now we’re equipped to look at the conclusion of our passage where Paul offers five examples of how we ought to behave if we’re being who we are, if we’re walking like Christians. We’re going to go through this quickly, and I want to show you what ought to motivate us to change. This is our fourth and final point.

- ❖ Notice a couple general observations. **Notice how, in all five examples, Paul pairs a negative prohibition with a positive command.** **1)** We’re to put away falsehood and to speak the truth (v25). **2)** We’re not to sin in our anger. We’re to reconcile in a timely manner (v26). **3)** We’re to no longer steal. Instead we’re to do honest work (v28) **4)** We’re not to speak in ways that corrupt but in ways that build up (v29). **5)** We’re not to grow bitter and angry with each other but to be kind, loving, and willing to forgive (vv31-32).

- ❖ What that tells me is that it's not enough to simply put off the old self if you're not putting on the new. It's not just about avoiding sin but also pursuing righteousness. **And then notice how Paul keeps attaching a theological reason to every exhortation.** That's so important. When you're discipling someone or keeping them accountable in their walk, it's so important to not just give bare commands – but to offers a theological reason. To explain why.
- ❖ And the key is to root it all in a **gospel motivation**. That's what Paul does in chapter 5:1-2, *“¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*
 - ▶ Paul's saying, “Be who you are. You're beloved, adopted children of God. So imitate your Heavenly Father like any child would. Walk in love just as Christ loved you. Give of yourself to serve the good of others just as Christ gave himself up for you.” It's all about the right motives. Motives matter.
- ❖ **How do you raise your kids to be honest?** To put away falsehood and to only speak truth? (v25) You can motivate them in a few ways. **You can use fear.** “You better not lie. You better tell the truth or God's going to get you. Or people won't trust you. You won't have any friends and you'll die alone.” That could work. They'll be scared straight.
 - ▶ **Or you can appeal to their pride.** “Don't lie. You don't want to be like those liars. We're better than that. We're better than them. Just tell the truth.” That might work. You can have kids who are trained to tell the truth. But why? Because it stokes their ego, and it adds to their contempt of anyone they ever catch in a lie. You might have yourself a truthful kid, but he's a pretty awful kid.
- ❖ The problem with appealing to fear or pride is that it's only so effective until one day an even stronger motivation or pressure overcomes. **Because, if in the end they're only telling to truth because of a self-serving motivation, one day they'll face a situation where telling the truth won't serve them well.** It won't seem to help. Then why would I? Why should I?
- ❖ Do you see why motivation matters? In every congregation, you have people sitting in the pews next to each other. Both are singing. Both are praying. Both are trying to live like Christians, to behave like Christians, in their day to day life.
 - ▶ One, because of **fear**. “Because if I mess up, God's going to get me. If I don't behave, he'll punish me.” And the other, because of **pride**. “Because I'm a good Christian and this is what good Christians do. Thank God I'm not like those immoral, godless people out there. I'm better than that.”
- ❖ But then there's a third person who's doing the same things, trying to live the same way. But motivated by **love** – *love for God* for his grace to us in the gospel. *Love for others* because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

- ❖ **This person, motivated by the gospel, is walking in love and obedience – and not for self-serving reasons.** So even if one day he faces a situation where walking in love and obedience to God is actually going to be costly, he still won't be deterred. Because he was never doing it for himself in the first place. That's the difference the right motivation makes.

- ❖ My question, of course, is: Which person are you? **What's motivating you to walk like a Christian?** How did you learn Christ? Did you learn him as a means to serve your own ends? Or did you learn Christ as your Lord and Savior? Who demands obedience but who also inspires it and enables it through his grace in the gospel?
 - ▶ This is the Jesus who has called you, freed you, changed you, and given you a new identity in him – go now and be who you are.