

NEW SELF, NEW MIND

(Ephesians 4) Today's study will relate to the doctrine of sanctification. What's that, you say? The doctrine of sanctification addresses the dynamics of spiritual growth. Sometimes in our eagerness to get straight to the how-tos of spiritual life we ignore the conceptual part of it, and we end up paying for it later because we lack an understanding of what is going on. Our study today is extremely important for us to grasp if we are going to grow as believers. **20-24** *But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* The text before us precedes and introduces two whole chapters of instruction about personal morality, about gospel obedience. It tells us what must happen in us spiritually before anything good is going to happen in us practically. I'll divide our examination of our text into five points, presented on your outline. Let's see first of all that change is expected. ® That is assumed all throughout the apostle's thought here. He says there is an old man and a new man and the transition from one to the other is what I'm calling change. It's fascinating to me, but somehow people who read the same Bible I do teach that you can become a Christian without any adjustments in your lifestyle. It is just a cold, contractual thing. A large part of the problem is found in our presentations of the gospel. We omit the important call to repent, to turn away from sin, to put away the old man with all of his deceitful lusts. Mickey Cohen was a gangster in Vegas, a leader in organized crime, many years ago, when a Christian friend invited him to an evangelistic crusade. Mickey went and walked the aisle, prayed a prayer, and his Christian friend was thrilled. Only one problem. Mickey didn't stop his activities in organized crime. After a couple of months his Christian friend approached him about it. He said, "Mickey, you got saved. Why are you still a gangster?" Mickey looked at him with puzzlement and said, "Nobody told me I would have to give up my job." I expect they didn't. Nobody suggested that a change of lifestyles would be part of the package, but it most certainly is. Change is a must.

Now, we are naturally resistant to change. We grow comfortable, and set in our ways. Oh, on this subject, do you know how many Country and Western singers it takes to change a light

bulb? Five. One to change the bulb and four more to sing about how much they loved the old one. But as believers there is nothing lovable about the lives we leave behind. For two weeks we have looked at what those lives are like and they are characterized by futility and darkness and exclusion and ignorance and hardness and impurity and greed. How can we want to have anything to do with that stuff? To participate in evil, for a believer, is like someone stripping off his stinky, wet, dirty old clothes, hopping into a bountiful shower, getting squeaky clean then putting on those same, skunky clothes. That's pathetic. That's no good at all. Christianity is essentially and necessarily a life transforming faith. I heard of one pastor's message in which he described people as taters. He said some of us are imitators, others are dictators, others are agitators, but we all need to be sweet taters. After the service the pastor was approached by one man in the church who said, "Pastor, nice sermon, but I yam, what I yam." That's the attitude so many have, and it's a bad one. We say, "that's just the way I am" as if changing what you are is either impossible or beyond reasonable expectations. But God says that He expects it. The gospel, when understood, requires some changes.

Those changes (and here we move to point #2) are going to be of two kinds. They will be immediate and they will be continual. ® On this point you will need to do some fine thinking with me. Here is the question. Is this laying aside of the old self and the putting on of the new self, described in our text, a past tense, done-deal reality or an ongoing one? There is some debate about this among commentators and biblical scholars. Those I respect most claim and have persuaded me that this is a past-tense, done-deal reality. The reading of the text in Ephesians 4 leaves some question about it, but the parallel passages don't. Colossians 3:**9-10** *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.* You see there that Paul speaks of this putting off and putting on as something which was intrinsic to their conversion. It is a done deal. In the same way we read in Romans 6:**6a** *Our old self was crucified with Him.* This is consistent with II Corinthians 5:**17** *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* There is no indication anywhere in these Scriptures, that the old man is still hanging around and in need of mortification. He is dead. He is passed away. Therefore, we should read Ephesians 4 as saying the same. What we find in verses 22-24 is a statement of what and how the Ephesians learned when they heard the gospel. This putting aside of the old

and putting on the new is a description of what occurs when one is born again. Now, this is not to suggest that there is not a sin-nature, what Paul calls the flesh, that continues to plague us. The old self and the flesh are two different things. The old man is my unconverted self. He is dead. The flesh however, is that sinful principle that remains in me and wages war against the Spirit. But the flesh should not be confused with the old self.

Now, having said that let me get to the continual aspect of the changes called for. I said that they will be both immediate or decisive, but also continual and ongoing. The putting off of the old man is the immediate part, but the renewing of the mind is the ongoing aspect of Paul's teaching.(R) This can even be seen in the verb tenses being used. In the Greek language it is normally the case that the present tense of a verb will be used to indicate that a certain activity is ongoing. For events that have a once-for-all nature it uses the aorist tense. OK? The verbs "lay aside" and "put on" are in the aorist tense, the once-for-all tense; whereas the verb "be renewed" is in the present or continual tense. The idea then is that, at conversion, we undergo a huge, dramatic change. The old man dies, this new man is given life, but then we undergo a process of adjustment to this new condition. We incrementally come to think like the new people we really are. It is sort of like getting married. The marriage happens in a moment. One minute you are single, the next you are married, but the adjustment to that new condition, the learning to think like married people and live like that is a continual process.

OK, with that perspective on it, let's look now at the individual exhortations. The first is to lay aside the old self. This is the pre-conversion you that he's talking about. This old self is marked by all the things we read about in verse 17-19. In verse 22 it connects the old self to the lusts of deceit. You could think of it this way, that the old self is one that is dominated by lusts and lies ®. When you become a Christian all that has to change. That old self is put to death by the Lord and what you have to do is lay it aside. I'm told that in some ancient culture they had the habit of punishing murderers by forcing them to carry around the dead body of their victim, not something you want to do voluntarily. Instead, you want to bury that thing. You want to put some serious distance between you and the old self. There should be a decisive break. I was impressed by a story I heard of the Roman invasion of Britain. The story says that when the Romans landed on their shores the Brits came out to defend their land with hoes and sticks and knives. But when the Roman armies landed their commanders had them burn their ships behind them. When the Brits watched this going on, they threw down their weapons and surrendered.

Why? In that act the Brits witnessed the determination of the invaders. This burning of the ships demonstrated the total commitment of the Romans to conquer. They would not retreat, because they could not. And when you make that kind of commitment to Christ, when you really lay aside the old man, put him to death, and bury him then your victory is assured.

Now, the third exhortation in our passage we will look at secondly. That is the call to put on the new self. And whereas the old self is marked by lust and lies, the new self is marked by holiness and truth. 24 *put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* You see that this new self is said to be like God. Colossians 3:10 is the parallel text 10 *put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.*

Notice a couple of things here. First of all, the new self is apparently not a finished product. Colossians 3:10 speaks of being renewed. This is a process, something like the planting of a tree. The life is completely there, but it is a growing, vital developing life. And what is the goal of its development? Where is it heading? To the full restoration of the image of God in man. Isn't that exciting? I just love seeing the continuity of the Bible, from the first book to the last. In Genesis we read of how man was created in the image of God, but then man sinned. When he sinned the image was not totally eradicated but it was definitely marred and defaced. But what God is doing in Christ is recreation. II Corinthians 5 calls us new creations, new creatures in Christ. He has made us over again and is now conforming us incrementally again, to the image of Himself which sin has so damaged. And that image, that likeness of God, is basically moral. It has to do with righteousness, holiness, truth. It is the tradition in some places for candidates for baptism to put on white robes as a symbol of this, because in becoming Christian we take off the old filthy rags of our own self-righteousness and sin; we put on a new purity. It is in that context that Paul goes on in the rest of Ephesians 4 to say these things: **25ab** *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. **26ab** Be angry and yet do not sin. **28a** He who steals must steal no longer. **29a** Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.* And so on. It's as if he is saying to us, "Hey, you have put on clean, lovely clothes, now be careful what you do in them

I wonder, I wonder to what extent you see yourself in the light of this teaching. Do you realize that, as a Christian, you are a creation of God, that He is building you into His holy

image? Can you see, in some way, the finished product? I believe that one of the most helpful things you can do as a believer, is to think through or even write down what your life would be like if you were perfectly Christlike. I call this having a vision for your life. Just ask yourself that question and give it some thought. How would I live differently if I were more like Christ? How would I act first thing in the morning? What would I do as I woke up? How would I speak to me secretary when I arrived at work? What kind of worker would I be? Can you imagine that? Establish that vision for your life and then put it on, piece by piece. You know, its very common for individuals to put up posters in their homes that speak to them about what they want to become. Maybe it's some model you want to look like or an athlete or some hero in your field. You put that picture up there to remind yourself, "that's what I'm shooting to be." Shouldn't we do the same thing as Christians? It doesn't have to be on your wall but it should certainly be in your mind a concept of what the new self is all about, what we are growing into, and that concept is supposed to look a whole lot like Jesus.

Well, I'm sort of getting into my next point now. We have seen the exhortation to lay aside the old self, put on the new self. Now we come to that one that is continual in character. Verse 23 *be renewed in the spirit of your mind*. Many of you immediately think of the well-known verse in Romans 12:2ab *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. That verse in the same way calls us to a process of ongoing change, continual transformation from what we were to what we are becoming. And the way mentioned in both cases is the renewing of the mind. Amazingly, some people think the mind has nothing to do with Christianity. They think it is all fizz and emotion, when in fact, the mind is at the very heart of the Christian life. We grow as believers by replacing the old tapes of selfishness and lies, with the new tapes of love and truth. Do you understand what I mean by that? Each of us has a way of mentally responding to certain stimuli. We speak to ourselves in response to everything that happens. Let's call those our tapes. You listen to tapes that tell you what is important, that tell you about yourself, that tell you about God. When those tapes come from the old self they are full of lies. And if we are going to live Christianly we will need to think Christianly which means that we need to replace those old tapes with a whole new set that we can get from God's word. Just as an example of what I mean. I was born with a tape that told me that I am the center of the universe and that all of you are here to serve me. Spiritual development means that I take out that tape and start playing one that says, "God is the center

of the universe and I am here to serve Him by serving others.” And that tape goes on to say that I’ll be happier when I do that. You see, renewing your mind means that you make a repeated decision to quit thinking like a lost, godless person. It is helpful when we identify some of those old patterns of thought so that we can consciously lay them aside. What are some of those for you? God says to get rid of them and start thinking like a new creation, like someone who is being groomed for royalty in the kingdom of God.

Well, Pastor, how do you do this renewing the mind thing? Oh, I’m glad you asked that question. You want something practical today? I’ve got something for you then. It’s a checklist for mental renewal. I offer seven practical suggestions for how to renew your mind. You ready?

#1 is to eliminate the influx of trash and poison into your mind. For many of you that means cutting way back on the TV in your life. Some of you may need to eliminate it entirely. Ugh! It may be as precious to you as right hand or right eye but if it makes you stumble cast it from you. Don’t play games in the Christian life - you need to mean business here. Some of you need to eliminate the rotten movies you watch, the vile sitcoms, and the soap operas. If you love Jesus, stop it! Some of you listen to secular music, country or rock, with horrible lyrics that drift through your mind all day. To listen to some of that stuff is the mental equivalent of chugging a can of motor oil. It is spiritual poison. And I’ll tell you honestly, my friend, if you are not willing to say, “no” to your mental pollutants you aren’t going anywhere as a Christian.

Secondly, you need to fill your ears with good things. ☺ Control what you hear. Some of you have jobs that allow you to listen to radio or some other audio source. Most of us spend major time in our automobiles. Use the opportunities God provides to flood your soul with what is true. We are blessed with multiple Christian radio stations in our area. Take advantage of that. *Philippians. 4:8 whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* There may also be times just to turn everything off and make your car or your environment a personal meditation and prayer space.

Thirdly, fill your eyes with good things. Watch what you read. The typical American reading diet is pure poison. Instead of reading the garbage in the newspaper and People magazine read what is good. Scripture comes first, but there are countless good books to be read. A reading Christian is almost always a growing Christian because the mind is being renewed. You are coming to think like the Lord.

Fourthly, use music for good. Every one loves music and it is a powerful thing because songs stay with you. How many of you can sing the theme song for Gilligan's Island? "Oh sit right back and you'll hear a tale..." Songs stick with you. Now that can be good or bad. Make it good. The ancient Hebrews were great at this. They learned Scripture in song. Psalm 119:**54a** *Your statutes are my songs.* Does this speak to your choice of music for the home and the road?

Fifthly, plan special times of meditation. I think here of a daily devotion, a set aside time to read God's word and to pray. You can meditate all day but special times are vital. Psalm 119:**147-148** *I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words. My eyes anticipate the night watches that I may meditate on Thy word.* Whether its before dawn or in the evening you need something like this - a time given to be still and know who is God.

Sixthly, memorize Scripture. ® What a valuable practice this is! If you memorize a passage it is always there for you. This is key to playing the right tapes. I suggest you do some self-analysis and figure out just what lies you have believed that are stealing your joy, and holding you back, then memorize Scripture specifically to counteract those lies. e.g. if you are prone to think that unless you get revenge justice won't get done, then memorize Romans 12:**18-19** *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.* Point six is that you renew the mind by memorizing Scripture.

Our seventh and last application is to keep good company. ® I Corinthians 15:**33** *Do not be deceived; bad company corrupts good morals.* And it corrupts a good thought life. I was sitting at a table in a restaurant last week between two other parties and at both tables the major topic of conversation was how awful certain other people were. It was gripe, gripe, gossip, gossip. When I left I couldn't wait to listen to some worship music and wash my mind of all that. Now, to some degree you can't pick your company, I know. But you choose whom you will party with or fellowship with and that is where you need to get with people who promote godly conversation and pure thoughts. I've mentioned before the word I heard from a speaker named Tremendous Jones. He asked his audience this question: "what will determine how you will change over the next five years?" His answer: it's the people you meet and the books you read ®. You could add to that, the content you listen to as well. It is how you program your mind. There are many other ways that you can achieve the goal of renewing your mind, but you want

to make this a conscious personal pursuit. It won't happen by accident. If you don't consciously seek to renew the mind according to God's truth, then you will become conformed to this world instead of being transformed into the image of Christ.

This study today is the kind you for you to go home and think about a while if you are to profit from it. Maybe you can talk about it as a family or with your friends. Ask yourself, what would my life be like if I were perfectly Christlike? Develop that vision and then look over the list of seven. What can you do, what can your family do to produce renewal in the spirit of your minds? May God bless you, as you seek to grow in Him. Let's pray.