

**CAPITAL BIBLE CHURCH
SERMON NOTES**

**May 27, 2018
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**Series: What's the church?
"Corruption to Renewal"
Ephesians 4:17-32**

In C.S. Lewis's book, *The Great Divorce*, he tells a story of a character who is tormented by a red lizard that sits on his shoulder. The red lizard represents our indwelling sin and is constantly mocking the young man. Then an angel comes and offers to remove the lizard. The man is initially overjoyed to be rid of this torment. However, the man realizes that the way the angel will get rid of it is by killing it and since the angel glows with burning heat, the man will also feel pain. At this moment, the young man has a change in heart and suggests that it isn't necessary for the lizard to die and decides that another time is better for dealing with the lizard. But the angel tells him, "this moment contains all moments". Now, the lizard recognizing the danger that it is in, begins to speak to the man to save itself. Listen to what the lizard says,

"The angel can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he will. Then you'll be without me and for ever and ever. It's not natural. How could you live? You'd be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn't understand. He's only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn't for us. Yes, yes. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren't they better than nothing? And I'll be good. I admit, I've sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won't do it again. I'll give you nothing but really nice dreams – all sweet and fresh and almost innocent."

Almost innocent. How many of us have sinned and told ourselves, "It can't really hurt. Even if it is wrong, to be without this sinful nature is not to be human. Who could live without committing sin sometimes? I know God will forgive me and I promise not to let it go this far again." When we think or say this rationale, we are letting our lizards live and we convince ourselves that the sin in our lives is not really dangerous, and that almost innocent is safe enough. Paul is going to tell us this morning that allowing the lizards to sit on our shoulder, to allow sin to continue to rule our lives, only proves fatal to the Christian life.

Why do I tell you that story this morning? Because this is precisely what Paul will be teaching us in Ephesians 4:17-32. This section of his letter speaks directly to how we have to put off our old self and put on our new self. And before Paul tells us all these differences, he tells us why we need to know these differences. The simple answer is knowing these differences holds the power of life and death. The seriousness of Paul's warning is clearly seen instantly in this passage. He tells the Ephesian Christians that they must no longer live as Gentiles. The Greek word here for walk means that believers must walk differently and on a different path than the rest of the world. The command to walk differently that Paul gives us is not an opinion or a suggestion, because Paul has already stated that this letter carries the weight and authority of Jesus.

Now today, when we hear Gentiles, nothing stirs in us. And therefore when we read this it loses some of the bite, horror and sadness. That is why when we use the words of Lewis, it helps us to understand. The bloodless, cold and insensitive nature that a little lizard creates in our minds makes it clear what sin is like.

Verse 18,19

When Paul states that they are darkened in their understanding, what he is talking about is spiritual ignorance, and the consequence is separation from the life of God. This language of the apostle is meant to startle, perhaps even to offend. Yes, unbelievers walk about and breathe without understanding life with God and therefore they live in a world of challenge and tragedy without the hope of God. But what is more startling is that this

command was not written to Gentiles, but to Christians. Paul tells us that living without hope must be avoided even by Christians. And the result of a darkened understanding or an ignorance to God is a hardened heart. The Greek word used here implies stubbornness and reflects what happens when opportunities to serve and learn about God are resisted.

Repeatedly making wrong choices causes the heart to become callous. Callous, that is such an appropriate word. “Almost innocent” choices have been allowed to rub against the heart so often that they have calloused it, just like someone’s hands become calloused due to work, your heart becomes calloused due to sin. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to Christians, not to unbelievers. He is saying that Christians fall into this trap and claim to be Christians but in reality, we could have a hardened, dark and calloused heart.

When we indulge in our sin, we need more and more and more to satisfy our lusts or desired sensations.

Examples, alcohol, porn, gambling, gossip.

Here’s the point, sometimes God graciously allows the disappointments of life to show us the hardening effects, and to free us from its grasp. God is speaking to you in those moments saying, “LOOK WHAT YOU ARE BECOMING.”

Denying yourself the indulgence of sin in a strange way is actually freeing. Continuing the story from The Great Divorce. The angel does attack the little lizard and kills the lizard with a quick twist of his hands. And when the angel tosses the lizard to the ground, surprisingly, it begins to change. The little, ugly lizard turns into a great and beautiful stallion. The creature that has ridden his shoulder to mock him is now mounted by the man. He who was the master is now the mastered. He who was in bondage is set free. That is us as believers. Our sin nature has been killed and now we are able to master it with the help of Jesus. It is altogether freeing, and it helps us understand how we can do our part for the church.

Verse 20,21

Everything that Paul just told us, he clearly and emphatically tells us “but that is not the way you learned Christ!” In our lives, we strive for relationships, for experiences, for sensations that we think will satisfy, only to realize how empty and cold they really are. Paul says, all those things, money, sex, power, comfort and prestige, are not how you come to know Jesus.

Paul pictures the truth totally in terms of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. All truth is found in Jesus, through Jesus and by Jesus. Look at verse 21:

- We heard about him – the way
- We were taught in him – the truth
- As the truth is in Jesus – the life

Jesus is in the truth of the Gospel and truth is in him. To know his truth is to know him.

We use headphones to amplify our music and drown out the surrounding noise. Same thing with Jesus. We must block out the static and noise from the world and amplify the music of the Savior.

Verses 22-24 “put off old, put on new”

Not only must we listen differently, but we must also live differently. Belonging to Christ involves renouncing an old life and embracing a new life. The image is that of taking off clothes and putting on new ones. All of us have old habits of our former, pre-Christian years that must be released. This doesn’t mean that we are held captive by our old self, or that our old self is still alive. Paul isn’t telling us to keep killing that which is already dead. It’s true, our old habits and sinful patterns are in our minds and in our memories, but Paul wants us to know that those habits are avoidable and through Jesus, we can master our sin. On this side of heaven, the process of sanctification is constantly at work. Sanctification is becoming more like Christ everyday.

This process of becoming more like Christ and shedding or releasing our past self, all of our sin, is not easy, partly because we hold on to them because we think that sin is a part of us and who we are. Back to C.S. Lewis and the lizard, that is the reason why the lizard was able to talk to the man so much and get the man to question whether or not he truly wanted the lizard gone. Same with us, there are moments in our lives when we question whether we want the sin to stop in our lives. We enjoy it, we crave it, it makes us feel good. See the man in the book recognizes that if the angel kills the lizard, then the man himself – as he knew himself and was oriented to this world – would also die. This is what is threatening to us: to kill past sin practices and patterns is to lose the self and the world that we knew. However, what makes a total reorientation occur, to have a new mind and a new self, a possibility to us is the understanding that in putting on the new self, we are introduced to a new reality of being a child of God.

Now, in all of this, by putting off the old self and putting on the new self, that doesn't mean that we will never sin. However, because of the living presence of Christ now in us by the Holy Spirit, we are not powerless when temptation comes our way. Guess how long it takes to put off your old self and put on your new self by the power of the Holy Spirit, your entire life. If you are still breathing, you are still growing, changing and becoming like Christ, if you are in Christ.

By the way, no one who struggles against sin is unique or strange or alone. Don't ever think that you have risen high enough or know enough about God that you do not struggle with sin. There is a terrible pride in thinking this way. Just like if you think you don't need to struggle against sin, this type of person is extremely vulnerable to sin. Those who really understand grace know the weaknesses of the human heart and how much we truly need God's grace. True Christians do not believe that fulfillment or real happiness will be found in the ways of the world because let me tell you this morning, the pleasures and comforts of this world are futile.

Unfortunately, too many Christians think that they "really understand" grace and then widen their tolerance for questionable entertainment, leave differences with Christian brothers and sisters unreconciled, become more self-indulgent with their time and treasures, become less concerned about holiness in speech and behavior and cling to their pride, ego and the appearance that they have control. After all, all these things are "almost innocent". Doing or not doing such things will neither make nor break a Christian. But those in love with Jesus will hear his voice, and it will break their hearts to know that they are hurting him. The love of Jesus is behind all of these warnings. We are to be mirror images of Jesus in our lives. When we understand this, we will no longer believe that "almost innocent" is acceptable. Evaluate yourself, are you being like Jesus, humble and loving, in all that you do? Because in Christ, we discover a life that's rich and most satisfying.

ANALOGY – salt water is like sin

The reason sin does not satisfy is the same reason that salt water does not. We are called to living water, that is Jesus. After the lizard turns into the stallion in "The Great Divorce", the man rides it and soars. Why? When we put off our sin and let Jesus crush it, we find the most rewarding life, a life in Jesus Christ. Scripture calls us to recognition and repentance. Recognition of the poison that sin is, even the almost innocent, and repent fully from all of it. **God never intends to harm us even though the expressions that warn us may hurt a great deal.** The call to recognition and repentance is the call to a life of rich fulfillment as we soar to the places where God intends for us to find our truest selves among his greatest joys.

Verse 25-32

Since we are God's workmanship, Paul tells us that we must work hard to honor God in what we say, think and do. But because we are fallen creatures, Paul understands that once we understand grace, we have an inclination to abuse God's grace and use that as a license to sin, which should never happen. He begins this portion by teaching us how the grace that renews us also stimulates personal holiness. Basically, when we truly understand grace, what should happen is our quick and direct obedience.

Paul gives **5 examples** of what living the new life means when we put off the old self.

- They must turn from lying to telling the truth (25,26)
- From uncontrolled anger to self-control (26,27)
- From stealing to useful labor (28)
- From harmful to helpful speech (29-30)
- From bitterness to love (31,32)

So, let's break each of these down quickly. What should a Christian not do? **Tell falsehood.** What should a Christian do? Speak truth with his neighbor. Christians are not to tell lies but only speak the truth. You would think that Paul wouldn't have to say this, hey Paul, we get it, don't lie. But Paul writes on this exact topic often throughout his writings. You know why? Paul understands that even for Christians, the temptation to lie is great. We cheat, we plagiarize, we lie in all sorts of manners when it comes to representing the work that we have done.

Another temptation is that of **falsely representing ourselves.** How easy it is to present ourselves as having had positions of greater responsibility or backgrounds of greater significance than what is really true. We say things that are not true to make ourselves look better or more important than what our true positions were.

Some also may be **tempted to create controversy in the church** by speaking of what they do not know or twisting what they do know. Example, you could take something I say from the pulpit, twist it to make me look foolish and you like more biblical or wise. But here's the problem with that. To question the integrity or intelligence of church leaders, we may presume and suggest without full knowledge why they took certain actions, and by undermining them elevate our own status or sense of importance. But to voice suspicions and to talk about what we do not know to be true contradicts biblical commands only to speak the truth. If you don't know all the facts, you have no grounds in speaking about it. Listen to Hebrews 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." I can promise you this morning, myself, Pastor Bill and the elders of this church care deeply for the health and well-being of this church. Everything we do comes from a place of dependence on God and how to help this church become all that God intends for it to be. Why? Because we will be held responsible for the success or failure of this church. Did you know, that pastors will have to answer and be responsible for every soul that God puts under their care. The Bible says that God's judgement will be more strict for pastors than members of the church. James 3:1 "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." We do the things we do and implement changes because we have a responsibility to God for each and every single one of you. Your spiritual health is our number one concern. Remember Ephesian 4:12, we equip you for ministry to build up the church. A stagnant church is a dead church. A dynamic church, a growing church, that's the model that Jesus has in mind.

Lastly, the **temptation in misrepresenting facts.** The opportunities to shade or hide the truth to avoid personal consequences or advance personal gain are constant challenges. We lie to get ahead. Now, we have all been there, done that. But Paul lifts our spirits when he tells us why we should tell the truth, because we are members of Christ's body. Why should we not speak lies, for the sake of the body. If eye doesn't tell hand stove is hot, the hand gets burned. (when trust disappears, the work of the church comes to a screeching halt.

See, if we proclaim grace and that we are a believer but do not display holiness or Christlikeness, we prevent the spread of the Gospel. The reason why we refrain from falsehood and maintain truth even under pressure is that God lifts our eyes to see that the relationships of trust are wheels on which the ministry of the church progresses.

The next example is to not have uncontrolled or prolonged **anger**. Note that he does not say that we should never get angry. Such a command would be impossible and even ungodly. There are just causes for righteous anger. Paul doesn't forbid anger but the sinful expression of it. Expressing anger honestly and explaining its source can be helpful and healthy, but simply venting uncontrollably only reinforces anger and further deepens roots, causing further relational damage. Expressing legitimate anger without sin is a true Christian virtue. Jesus says do not let the sun go down on your anger, it doesn't say do not let the sun go down on your dispute. Anger is wishing malice towards others. We cannot go to bed angry, but we can go to bed with disputes unresolved.

Paul is concerned with this because if we let anger prolong and fester, we are inviting Satan into our hearts and letting him gain an advantage over us. Even when we have a just cause for our anger, if we let it simmer so that our minds nurse the grudge at night and repeatedly think over our pain, what grows in us is of little use to us and of little attractiveness to others. Our anger spoils us. It has been said that anger is an acid that destroys its container.

Next, Paul tells us to stop **stealing**. We are all a thief, whether that is shoplifting, time from work, money. It is a dishonor to God whenever we steal. Paul tells us instead of stealing, to get to work so that we can help and share with others. We must move from a taker to a giver. I challenge each of you to act selflessly because Christ was selfless and humble. Remember last week, humility is a prerequisite for harmony.

Then Paul tells us to not let any **unwholesome speech** come out of our mouths. The Greek word for unwholesome literally translates "rotten" or "putrid" and generally references profanity and obscenities. Paul literally says, "all bad speech, do not let journey out of your mouth." Remember earlier we talked about almost innocent. When we let profanity and rotten speech come out our mouths, our heart gets a little more calloused to sin. What we think and what we say reflect our heart. Jesus says in Matthew 15:11 "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." The words we speak and thoughts we think give us a picture of the condition of our heart. But Paul goes one step further, he even tells us that even if we are not cussing, the Christian standard is that if the words you speak do not build up the body of Christ, do not speak them. Our words should build up the body of Christ at all times.

Verse 30

Do not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Listen to what Spurgeon has to say about verse 30.

"This text reveals to us the close connection between the Holy Spirit and the believer; the Holy Spirit must take a tender and affectionate interest in us since he is grieved by our shortcomings and our sins. He is not a God who reigns in solitary isolation, divided by a great gulf; but he, the blessed Spirit, comes into such near contact with us, takes such minute observations, feels such tender regards, that he can be grieved by our faults and follies. Although the word "grieve" is a painful one, yet there is honey in the rock; for it is an inexpressibly delightful thought that he who rules heaven and earth and is the Creator of all things and the infinite and ever blessed God condescends to enter into such infinite relationships with his people that his divine mind may be affected by their actions." – Spurgeon

We have such an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit that he grieves when we sin. This should be great motivation not to sin, so we do not cause the Holy Spirit to grieve.

Verse 31,32

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Simply put in verse 31, those things should never take place inside a church body. Period.

Why do we have to forgive? Because God forgave us while we were still his enemies. Even if someone is still your enemy, you must forgive them because God forgave you. See, the refusal to forgive, in all its forms, is fundamentally contrary to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is why we must forgive. My life will never deserve his love, but my life can reflect his love.

We must let Jesus kill and destroy the lizard in our life even though it will hurt us initially. Breaking the chains of our sin do not feel good. It is painful to have sin ripped away from our lives but Jesus commands us to live for him, which means allowing him to break us of our sin, so we can live a life that reflects Jesus.

Gospel/invitation

Pray