

Out with the old, in with the new

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[0 : 00] It'd be worth keeping that passage open in front of you as we look through that together now. A few of you might be aware last night was the Champions League final. Liverpool against Tottenham, not a great game, but a good night if you're a Liverpool fan.

It's the last club game of the season. And so for those of you not so interested in football, I'm thinking of my wife, but I'm sure there's others. You might think, well, thank goodness that the football is out the way for a bit.

But I'm here to tell you that you'd be very wrong if that was your attitude, because it is now the transfer season. The transfer window is open at the time when players are bought and sold, the times when newspapers make up all sorts of rumours about who is going where, the time of year when you become convinced that some South American teenager who you've seen for about 45 seconds on YouTube is the answer to all of your team's problems.

It's kind of like a soap opera for football fans. It's a good time of the year. But the thing that you'll see again and again, kind of the pinnacle of excitement in the transfer window, is these new signings, if and when they finally arrive, being paraded about in their new strip, in the kit of the team that they've moved to, decked out from head to toe in the red or the white or the blue or whatever colour it is that they're now going to be lining up in.

Social media kind of pages and photos and videos showing the player in their new kit. And that's right, isn't it? It would be a strange press conference if this player turned up in their old kit.

[1 : 37] There'd be something seriously wrong if they took to the field still wearing the strip of a team that they don't belong to anymore. People would start to question, wouldn't they, what's going on here?

How kind of committed is this guy? No, instead what we see is off with the old, off with any kind of hint of that, and instead on with the new. And that's what this passage that we're looking at this morning is all about.

That for those of us who've accepted the truths of the gospel that Paul has been laying out in Ephesians, for those who've put their trust in Jesus and through that being united to God, through that being united to one another, through that being made part of the church, Paul's emphasis in these verses is to say, look, a major transfer has taken place here.

And we cannot take our old clothing, our old way of life with us. We have to take off the old, old habits, old patterns of life, old behaviors, old ways of speaking, and instead put on the new.

Paul's kind of message is that Christians aren't called to blend in with the world around us, like a chameleon, but instead to have distinctive lives that stand out, lives that show what team we're on, lives that show that we are different from what we were before.

[3 : 00] So that's what we're going to see in this passage. Paul kind of lays out that principle, first of all, and then we're going to spend the bulk of the time in the middle of that passage where he gives us examples of what that looks like, and then he wraps things up at the end with a conclusion, reminding us about the motivation, about the power behind this change that occurs.

So first of all, let's look a little bit more closely at this principle, verses 17 to 24. And the principle is this, it's very simple, it's what we've already said, it is out with the old and in with the new.

Have a look at verse 17. Paul starts really bluntly, he really is insisting on this. Now I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

What's a Gentile? Remember, Gentile was this word used basically for anyone who didn't follow God. And it's really important as we get this, it sounds like Paul's been quite harsh on the Gentiles here, it's really important to remember that a significant proportion of this church in Ephesus had been Gentiles.

This is a church full of people who had been idol worshippers, who'd been into kind of magic and things like that, who'd been following witchcraft and everything that goes along with that. That's who these guys had been.

[4 : 20] Paul himself has described himself, his ministry is to preach to the Gentiles. And so when he's calling people not to be like the Gentiles any longer, he's not being, it's not kind of elitism, it's not tribalism, it's not kind of we're better than those people.

Paul is saying that this is what you were like, that is the old self, but now no longer are you like that. Paul's instruction is that they're to be distinct, not only from the people around them, but also distinct from the people that they used to be.

Why is that? Well, it's because a change has happened. And because of that, it is out with the old, and it is in with the new. And it's the same for us today. This teaching of Ephesians for the church today in Scotland is to say that if we follow Jesus, then we are not supposed to just be like the world around us.

That if we follow Jesus, we're not supposed to be the same people that we were before that was the case. Just the same as for this church in Ephesus. For us, it's to be out with the old, and in with the new.

That in following Jesus, a major change has happened. And yet, as we begin again laying out this principle, it's so important that we understand the direction of this change.

[5 : 38] So what's Paul speaking about? He's talking about kind of taking off the old, putting on the new. The picture is that kind of picture of clothing, really. It's that picture, you know, standing at the wardrobe, taking off kind of manky old clothes, chucking them in the bin, and instead taking out something that is new and clean.

It's a picture speaking about what's on the outside. It's a picture speaking about what is seen. Really, it's to do with our behavior that Paul's speaking. And yet, he's really keen to stress that this change begins much deeper than that.

Paul's really keen to make sure we know it's a change on the inside, which means that we have to change what's on the outside to match up with that. It's that change on the inside that comes first.

What does Paul say is the ultimate problem for the Gentiles? Now, what does the Bible say is that it's kind of the root issue for people who aren't Christians? Well, it's not to do with what they're doing so much.

Verse 18, it boils down to a hardness of heart. It comes down to the fact that their heart is hard. Because of that, they've rejected God. Because of that, they're alienated from him.

[6 : 48] And then because of that separation, they're darkened in their understanding, Paul says. It means they don't grasp the truth of how life works in relation to God. And therefore, into verse 19, their lives are marked by sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Can you see the kind of the pattern, the direction there? It's from the inside out, isn't it? It's ultimately, if our hearts are hard to God, that these steps then, through the mind, through our actions, lead to these other behaviors.

Sensuality, impurity. These are quite general terms, but the general idea behind them is kind of physical things that we look to for satisfaction.

These are things that we hope will make us feel good. And what does Paul say about these? That we're greedy for these. The idea is constantly wanting more.

And why does he say that? Well, it's because ultimately, these things cannot satisfy. We look for our satisfaction anywhere other than a relationship with God, and we're not able to find it.

[7 : 55] All of these things that we kind of strive after, whether it's money or power or relationships, whatever it is, we end up saying, well, just maybe one more. Or maybe this time.

Or maybe if I just go a bit deeper. But ultimately, this sensuality, this impurity, it never satisfies, it never works. It always leaves us wanting more.

And Paul's point is that something has to change. And that change happens. Just as the problem works from the inside out, so that change has to be from the inside out as well.

That is the direction that this happens. And I want to say kind of really clearly here, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, we're absolutely delighted that you're here. I just want to make really clear to say that we're not here to try and kind of force a behavioral change on people.

The point of the church isn't to say, look, here's a mold that you need to squeeze yourself into. The message of the Bible, the message of the church, the message of the gospel is to say that through Jesus, there is a real way for us to be connected to God.

[9 : 03] That through Jesus, we can be no longer alienated, no longer separated from him. Now, as a church, that is what we want to point people towards, that ultimate cure, the start of that change, of knowing God, the deepest change there is.

And that as our hearts then are open to God, is that relationship is made possible. And then that will change what the rest of our lives look like. And that's what Paul then speaks about, out with the old and then in with the new and how that change begins on the inside.

Verses 22 to 24, we're called 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 in the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness. It's that inner renewal that Paul speaks about in our spirits, in our minds.

It's that understanding of who God is and what he's done for us. that is what moves us on to put on this new, this kind of new clothing, this new behavior. That is what moves us to live in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[10 : 17] I think again, that footballer signed for his new team, he doesn't belong to that team because he's wearing the strip. He's wearing the strip because he now belongs to that team.

That change, that transfer happens first. I can go and buy myself a Liverpool strip. It does not make me a Liverpool player. It doesn't earn me Liverpool wages.

Sad state of affairs. But in the same way, this change in our behavior, if we just try and kind of bolt that on on the outside, that doesn't make us a new person. That doesn't make us right with God.

That doesn't earn us a relationship with him. It is because through Jesus, through trusting in him, we're able to be united to God. That is why we live out this new life, striving to be who we are in Jesus.

Before we go on to this kind of middle section and look at what that looks like in a bit more detail, let me just link this to what we talked about last week. Remember, we talked about how the whole church is involved in the work of ministry, that we're all involved in that.

[11 : 26] That there are different gifts within that. We have different roles to play. But a big part of that, as we kind of move on through chapter four, a big part of what that looks like building up the church is simply living this new life in and around other people.

A big part of this is simply living this out, especially around people who don't know Jesus, especially around people who we don't find at church. A big part of this kind of ministry to the church is simply being prepared to live a life that sticks out a little bit, live a life that shows there's been a change, live a life that prompts people to ask questions.

And in all of this, in response to that, not being able to point to behaviors and say, yes, you should do this like I do this, but instead point to the God who makes this new life possible.

So there we go. That's the principle, out with the old, in with the new. That starts with the heart. That starts with a relationship with Jesus. But how then does it work itself out in kind of the nitty gritty of day-to-day life?

What is this new behavior that we put on that comes with this new life in Jesus? And we're going to see here four examples that Paul gives. We'll just look through each one really quickly. But I think as we look through, we're going to see they're so intensely practical and relevant to us today.

[12 : 46] And also I hope as we look through, you'll notice each one is a kind of a stop doing this. There's a take off the old self. But then there's more than that. There's also a start doing this.

Put on the new self. There's this taking off and there is this putting on. So let's have a look through four of these. The first one, verse 25, is no more falsehood, Paul says.

Put away falsehood. And instead putting on, speaking the truth to one another. What a great example this is. What a kind of day-to-day thing we face, isn't it?

It's so easy for us to be kind of economical with the truth. It's so easy for us to present things as we'd like them to be rather than how they actually are. It's so easy for us to talk in a way that makes it look like we've got it all together, a way that covers up our mistakes.

Paul says here, stop being false with each other. Put that off. And yet he doesn't stop there, does he? He doesn't say, you know, stop lying, just sit quietly, sit in silence. No, he says, stop lying and tell the truth because we're members of one another.

[13 : 52] Because the church is united together. Because the church is founded on the gospel, then we're able to speak the truth to each other. We're able to speak even what we might think of as those ugly truths.

Those truths that don't really show us in the best light. Those truths that we'd rather kind of tuck away and keep covered up. The church should be a place where more than anywhere else we can be real with each other about what's going on.

Where we can do that safe in the knowledge that we're not going to be judged by other people but we'll be loved. The church is the place where we can reveal things. That doesn't mean having to kind of stand up here at the front and kind of tell everyone our deepest, darkest secrets but it does mean that we should have some people that we can be honest with that we're prepared to speak to.

That might be something that these prayer triplets will help with. That might already be relationships that you've got within the church. That might be kind of people that you need to seek out. The new self is able to have that honesty with one another because our value isn't found on keeping up this pretense that we're a really good person but it's based on the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

That forgiveness that we all know that we all need and so that we're members of one another. United by the gospel and so putting off falsehood and instead putting on telling the truth to one another.

- [15 : 20] Example number two verse 26 Be angry and do not sin do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. It's often been pointed out here rightly so that Paul doesn't say don't be angry.

Paul says Paul understands there are times when we will be angry. There are times when it's right to be angry. What we're to put off is sinning in response to being angry.

That's what's being put off be angry but do not sin. Again that's actually only half the story that the putting on then is the second half of that verse. Don't let the sun go down on your anger and give the devil a foothold.

Paul's point is to say that if we're to say I've been angry with that person for weeks but I have not kind of punched them in the face once well actually that's not quite good enough.

That's not quite the standard that Paul's holding us to. That's putting off a sinful response to anger but it's not putting on this new self that seeks after peace.

- [16 : 26] There's a brilliant line in one of Robert Burns' poems which speaks about a wife, I'll just say it in a kind of an English accent I'm not going to try and put on the Robert Burns voice it speaks about a wife sitting at home gathering her brows like gathering storm nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

I just think that idea of nursing your wrath to keep it warm is so incredibly vivid and real isn't it? We feel kind of when we feel righteously angry we love to keep hold of that.

We love to kind of nurse that to feed it to hold on to it. And we might never plan to kind of use it to act on it but it gives us that sense of superiority. It gives us that sense of self-righteousness.

It enables us to look down on people that we're rightly angry with. It reminds us that they've done things wrong and we haven't. And yet Paul says that will not do. Paul says that keeping anger like that kills the unity of the church.

Paul says it gives the devil that kind of crack in the door that he can crowbar open and split everything apart. Instead Paul's teaching here and it's really difficult is that we need to be able to put that anger aside.

- [17 : 40] Don't let the sun go down on our anger. Deal with that anger. And we might be rightly angry but we're called to deal with that either kind of within ourselves put ourselves to right or if needed to speak to other people to speak to people involved but to do that lovingly.

It's difficult. And yet that is this new way of life speaking peace in the place of anger. Example three let's keep on kind of rattling through these verse 28 let the thief no longer steal that's the put off but rather here's the put on let him labour doing honest work with his own hands that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Again the way of living which kind of characterises the old self it is me first. Happy to kind of stretch the rules to benefit ourselves. What does that look like for us?

It could be anything couldn't it? It could be tax things it could be borrowing things with no intention of ever giving them back it could be sort of manipulating the system so that we get what we want at the expense of other people.

And so instead we're called to put on this attitude which is willing instead of stealing instead of taking what we haven't earned to work hard. Notice even that isn't just for ourselves it's not work hard so that you can get your own stuff it's so that we can serve others.

[19 : 04] It's so that we've got something to share. And we put off this selfish attitude us at the expense of others and put on this selfless attitude working for the sake of others.

And there are so many around us who are in need often we're blind to that often we're willfully blind to that we don't want to see that. How distinctive would it be if we were looking for those needs and looking to help them even if that requires work and effort on our own part.

One of our values as a church is to be a serving community. It doesn't just mean the church kind of organising lots of things to do for other people it's each one of us having this attitude where we look to give rather than take.

where we're willing to work hard not just to kind of build our own bank balances or build our own security or whatever but work hard in order to share with those in need.

And there are so many people in need. The last example number 4 verse 29 put off corrupting talk and instead put on the kind of speech that builds people up that encourages each other that ultimately points people to Jesus.

[20 : 23] It's so easy isn't it for us to get involved in gossip that's just as easy inside the church as it is outside the church. It's so easy for us to kind of slide into bad language. It's so easy for us to speak harshly about people to speak about to use words about people that we would never think of using if they were standing there in front of us.

Why is it so easy? Well it's because that's what everyone does. That's the way of the world it's because that's the way that we used to live where we can use what we say to kind of cut others down in order to kind of lift ourselves up above them.

And yet the new way of life is the opposite. It's not simply as my mum used to say if you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all and I'm sure we've all heard that. Paul goes beyond that to say well what can I say that will encourage this person?

And what gifts do I see in that person that I can thank them for? Who can I see that looks a bit low and looks like they could do with a chat? Who do I see who looks a bit lonely and looks like they could do without a friend to speak with?

In all of these situations I'm sure you'll know as well as I do it's always easier not to. I often feel like my mind is kind of perfectly attuned to make up excuses not to do these things.

[21 : 38] It's sort of the excuse before I've even thought of the thing that I could do that was nice. There's already this excuse there waiting for it. And yet to put on this new life is marked not only by not bringing people down with what we say but by going further than that, putting ourselves out in order to build others up.

And so those are the four examples Paul gives. We could have spoken for weeks about each one of those couldn't we? And I'd encourage you to think about those a little bit more. Maybe ask someone after the service which one do you find most challenging?

What does that look like for you? What are the things where we're kind of battling to put off the old and put on the new? All of Paul's letters are written to the churches. It's written to kind of collectives.

These are things that we strive to do together. But I hope even as we've just scratched the surface of those four different examples that you can see this morning whether you're a Christian or not that you can see that that paints an incredibly attractive picture of life.

That it paints an incredibly attractive picture of a community. That as it's summarized in verse 31 that all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander are put away with all malice.

[22 : 58] And in their place this new life characterized it in verse 32 by being kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as Christ forgave you.

Isn't that what all of us would like to be more like? Isn't that what all of us would like to have as kind of characteristics that describe us, characteristics that describe our relationships, that describe our communities?

As Paul kind of lays this out, it's an incredibly attractive picture when we think about it. It's a great invitation for us to be able to hold out. I hope as a church that we are in some way growing in how we live this out.

that these characteristics are starting to reflect us or that we're starting to reflect these characteristics more and more, that we do see this attitude in others and that others would see it in us.

I hope as we look through this it comes across as really attractive, but I'm sure it will also have come across as incredibly difficult. Each one of these examples, incredibly difficult to keep.

[24 : 03] are so difficult in fact. We say, well, how is this even possible? That sounds great and I'm sure it would be brilliant if we were like that, but I know myself, you know, I fall short of that standard.

It's so hard. Well, that brings us to Paul's conclusion where we'll finish. And Paul's conclusion is this, that he reminds us that these are not just attitudes or ways of life that we can muster up in our own strength.

But these are ways of life which are only possible through the gospel. That as we said right at the beginning, that these are the clothes, these are the behaviours that follow that new relationship with God.

That that change has to be from the inside out. It begins with the heart. And so verse 32, that's why we're able to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving, because Paul says, God in Christ forgave us.

And it's when we know that forgiveness, it's when we really think about it, when we kind of meditate on it, when we live out of that forgiveness. That is when we're able to have that same attitude toward other people.

[25 : 12] Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, it's as we live as God's children, as we remember God as our heavenly father and all that Jesus did to make that possible, that is how we imitate him.

That we're able to love as Christ loved us. And what does that love look like? It looks, isn't it, as we've seen in those different examples that Paul lays out, it looks like a sacrificial love.

Chapter 5, verse 2, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. And to be imitators of God means to imitate that sacrificial love.

It means not only to imitate that in kind of big, spectacular, kind of splendid ways that make the news, but also to imitate that sacrificial love in the nitty-gritty, in the day-to-day life, in the conversations that we see with people where we live.

So as we imitate that sacrificial love, that we are free to deal generously with people in all sorts of different ways. Even when that means that we don't get what we deserve. Why? Because we're secure in what Christ has given to us.

[26 : 27] Our forgiveness, our relationship with him and with God as our Heavenly Father. I hope as a church that we are able to build a community that people can come and enjoy being part of, not just on a Sunday, but as a church, as a kind of community keen to be involved in each other's lives and the life of the wider community throughout the week.

I do hope as that happens, as we feel we can kind of invite people along, as we get to meet people as we live out this life among them, that there's something kind of attractive there that draws people in.

That there's something attractive in a church community based on the gospel. But I do hope that this kind of attractiveness, this church, this community, is always pointing to Jesus as the one who makes that possible.

This church is not and never will be the hero of the story. It's Jesus and Jesus alone who is the hero. without Jesus this church has no foundation.

Without Jesus this all falls down. Without him none of this kind of attractive way of life that Paul's been laying out is possible. And yet with him we find that we are able gradually, slowly, often far more slowly than we'd like, but we are able to put off the old self.

[27 : 47] We are able to strive to leave behind our old patterns of life, behaviors, speech, thoughts, and instead as Paul says, put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This new self which is kind and tender-hearted and forgiving, which in the nitty-gritty details of life points to Jesus Christ who is perfectly kind and tender-hearted and forgiving toward us.

that our life would point people towards the one who loved us and gave himself up for us. And that in response to that we would be willing, we would be able to love others and to give ourselves up for them in whatever form, however big, however small that might take.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.