

How to Live the Life – The lighter way to live - Ephesians 4:17-32 Sunday 22nd October 2017

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How many times have you heard someone say, or even said it yourself, “That’s me , you either like me or you don’t” or “ I’m not going to change for anyone, I am who I am and that’s that” or even “ I can’t change” . Is the adage true a Leopard can’t change its spots? (Incidentally that’s from the bible – Jeremiah 13 v 23) Yet here Paul is telling the Ephesians to do exactly that.

It’s interesting that Tom has chosen the title The Lighter Way to Live. When a person loses a significant amount of weight it does make a huge difference, not only to their appearance, but to their health. They have more energy, and a lower risk of developing all sorts of conditions connected to obesity.

Paul tells the baby Christians at Ephesus that they need to take off their old self and put on their new self? What did he mean by that? What did it mean to the Ephesians then and what does it mean to us today?

Do you remember Mr Benn. He was a children’s television character from the early 1970’s. He used to visit the dressing up shop and have adventures through a door in the back of the changing room; here’s a clip which is a bit of a spoof but will give you the right idea.



When we put on some fancy-dress costume or even new clothes we may feel uncomfortable. In fact, one of my real hates is going to buy new clothes! Now before you laugh at that I have to say that I have put on a great deal of weight over the last 10 years and where once I could wear anything I now have to choose more carefully! trying on clothes became an ordeal. I hated the fact that I couldn’t fit into anything properly. Nothing felt comfortable. At last I’ve found a diet that suites, and the weight is coming off.

But change can be hard for us all. Jesus talked about putting wine into new wineskins. We are told we are a new creation when we start following Jesus. But what does all this mean practically.



Let’s look at the Ephesians first. They lived and worked in a very large city of 250,000 residents, wealthy and powerful, and worshiped the female Goddess Artemis, the Goddess of hunting and childbirth! Into this city Paul had come and planted a church.

It was in Ephesus that Apollos was discipled and trained (Acts 18:24-27). It was in Ephesus that the sick were healed by Paul’s old handkerchiefs and aprons (Acts 19:12). It was in Ephesus that the seven sons of Sceva lost a punch up with a demon possessed man (Acts 19:13-17). It was in Ephesus that a massive pile of magic books were burnt (Acts 19:19). The first letter to the churches in Revelation is written to the church at Ephesus.

So here we have a young church trying to live in a culture that was full of sexual immorality, greed, power, lack of morals and untruthful. Everything that comes with material success and a secular society. Sounds familiar doesn’t it.

Paul wanted them to know that being a Christian wasn't just about saying the prayer of commitment to Jesus and attending church meetings, it was about a lifestyle; the lifestyle that Jesus had lived and asked his followers to imitate.

It was about changing their clothes.

As we look at verses 17 to 19 we get the picture of the way of life in Ephesus. The end of verse 19 says "they are full of greed".

We live in a society that is full of greed, and it's easy to get drawn into it.

I don't need to give you examples. I'm sure you can all think of one you struggle with right now. And in the very next paragraph Paul tells us that greed corrupts.

When I take my grandsons into Sainsburys they immediately want to go to the toy aisle. So off they go followed by Nanny and before long they have chosen a toy each and its in the basket. They have lots of toys, they don't need a new one every time we go food shopping. But it happens.

Recording programmes became a real Godsend because we could skip the ads. Now with catch-up TV the ads are not so prolific but you can't skip them. Social media has caught on big time with advertisements for stuff bombarding us whenever we go on line, and even online music is now dotted with ads you can't skip. The Christmas ads are big business and how many of us don't enjoy the John Lewis Christmas ads and the war between the big boys to see which will be the most popular. In fact, let's have a test. Who can remember the



John Lewis Christmas ad 2016? Who was the star?

So what advice did Paul give the Ephesians, and all Christians since then including us.

"Be made new in the attitude of your mind and spirit"

Can I check you all out for a minute?

So, we all have minds, therefore we can all have renewed minds. In some Christian circles the mind is a bit of a sticky subject, seen as the enemy, or a tool to be used by him. Please don't throw out your brains with the baptismal water. God gave us brains to use, and to think and to imagine and to learn.

So, here's Paul's top tips for renewing your mind and your behaviour.

1. Don't lie
2. Don't allow anger to lead to sin.
3. Don't steal
4. Don't talk dirty
5. Don't disappoint God's Holy Spirit.

1. Don't lie. Sounds simple. Instead speak truthfully because not only is it good for us but also shows people who go "Christian watching" that we are what we say we are. Lying is so very destructive. Not only does it harm the person lying, as they struggle with trying to remember the last lie they said so they can keep the deception going. But also, the people who are being lied too. Eventually truth has a way of finding its way out and then the damage is often irreparable.
If you are struggling with telling lies today, don't carry on, talk to someone, even talk to one of the prayer team today. Help is available.
2. Don't allow anger to lead to sin. Paul isn't saying don't get angry. Anger is a normal emotion. It's what you do with the anger that matters.
Friday night Ian Long came to Friday Night Live Worship and he spoke about emotions. He told us emotions aren't instructions their feelings. We must learn to recognise our emotions and to judge them and choose to use them accordingly.
Anger is a powerful emotion. So powerful Paul adds don't let the sun go down on it. In other words, deal with it quickly, and don't let it fester because it gives the devil a foothold.
3. Don't steal. How many thieves have we got here today? Don't look so horrified. Have you ever borrowed something and never returned it; taken an envelope or a stamp from work; forgotten to pay for an item at the supermarket, or in my case, not scanned it through. Or maybe you have a habit that you can't control that causes you to steal. Again, with that get help, even today. But Paul says, don't steal, don't be tempted, instead look to the needs of others: in other words turn this on its head, give and be generous.
4. Don't talk dirty. Don't let things come out of your mouth that tears down a fellow human being. Don't gossip, don't malign someone's character to others. Don't bitch! Tom Wright puts it so well

"How would it be if God were the kind of God who was always making snide and bitter remarks about us? What would worship and prayer look like if we thought God had been talking behind our backs, putting us down to others? How would it feel if we thought we couldn't trust God to tell us the truth, if he was always losing his temper with us? Well: how do people feel about us if that's what were like? Wouldn't it be better in every way to be like God?"

(Paul for Everyone - The Prison Letters – Ephesians)

5. Don't disappoint or GRIEVE the Holy Spirit. One of the verses that has been used to whip people and can be very scary. What does it mean? Ahhh..
This is what it means. The Holy Spirit has been given to Christians, placed inside us is the common term used as a seal, like a Kings seal on a document; to say this person is mine. When we make the decision, we are going to do our very best to follow Jesus and take on the badge of a Christian, we are sealed with Gods Holy Spirit. God says he's/she's mine. Hands off.
When we then act as if we are not we disappoint the Holy Spirit. Just like we might disappoint our parents, or our fellow Christians.

So there we have some very practical new clothes to put on, and I would urge you today if you are challenged by any of these things come and get prayer today, talk to someone. Help is available. We are called to walk beside each other and to restore each other. This church is a safe place to do this.

Paul then rounds up with this

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you. V32

I remember hearing a talk about making Kindness fashionable. I can't remember now who gave it, but it had a deep impact on me.

Kindness is not something that comes easily in our society. Particularly when driving kindness is not very often shown! But kindness is a beautiful thing.

Can you think of one thing that you can do to show kindness, shout them out?

You cannot be kind without having love in your heart. Kindness doesn't come out of bitterness, rage, anger, slander etc.

A young Christian woman has started a FB page promoting kindness. She has listed 100 ways to show kindness. It's worth a look.



So, in conclusion, Paul is teaching the young Ephesians and us to work hard with the help of the Holy Spirit to live a life worthy of the name of Jesus.

To grow up in the faith and to be able to use our minds to discern the right choices. To make kindness fashionable.

As I say so often Jesus lived a life that we must learn to follow, and he tells us that people will know we are his disciples because we love one another. This Christianity thing was never designed for us to go it alone. So, let's encourage, support and walk with one another, today and everyday onwards.

