

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Deconstruction/Reconstruction of the Disciples' Life Pt 3

Ephesians 4:20-24

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 01.30-31.10

Good morning. It's good to have you here at Crossroads this morning. I want you to take your bibles and let's open to that familiar passage that we've been studying now in Ephesians chapter 4. We're not done worshipping. We're going to come back and do that again at the end of the service as we celebrate those who are being baptized but right now we're going to end our worship time just a bit early. We're going to move into our teaching time in Ephesians chapter 4 and as you know we are in the middle of a series that I started just about three weeks ago called the Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciples Life. If you're just joining us let me get you caught up to speed on where we're at.

One of the greatest misunderstandings about Christianity that the world have is the idea that it is a religion that has to do with some types of works righteousness. What I mean by that is that the world's understanding, I probably heard this a dozen times, maybe even several dozen. I have no idea how many times I've heard this. It's an espousal of a theology that says that if I do the right things, if I live the right way, if I'm just the right person, if I have more good things in my life than bad things then God is going to receive me and He's going to reward me by allowing me to come to heaven. That's kind of the worldly view of Christianity. Now, those of us in this room I have confidence know that that's not the theology of Christianity. In fact, in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul tells us very clearly what it means to be a person who follows Jesus Christ. That our salvation is based not in our own works righteousness rather it is by grace that we have been saved through faith. That's not a work of our own. It's a gift from God so that none of us can boast. We understand that. We understand that it's not what we do it's what's been done for us. But I probably don't need to tell you that.

What I do need to help you remember is probably the second great misunderstanding or misnomer of Christianity that happens within the Christian world. And that is the idea that once we become followers of Christ, now we have to spend the rest of our lives doing all that we can to be good; to maintain it; to keep the Ten Commandments; to do whatever we think we can to stay in the good graces of God. We get ourselves into this idea that if we fail that God becomes disappointed with us and if we live at that level long enough we become so frustrated that we're ready to just chuck the whole thing. Have you ever been there? Have you ever gotten to that point where you think I just can't do this? And, in fact, if you read some passages incorrectly, for example, in Ephesians 4, verse 1. If you read that with that mindset you would think that's what that's saying. Paul says I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Now, if you think the key word, the anchor word is walk, what you are to do, you are supposed to walk in a certain manner you're going to say I can't do this. But that's because that's not the key word. That's not the anchor word and that's what we've been learning that the true anchor of this text is not the word walk. It's the word calling.

Now, what we've been talking about is the idea that you and I can be people of righteousness. We can have not only our desires but our will and our actions bent towards

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righteousness because of our salvation, because of our calling. We can walk in righteousness because of what God has done in our lives. And that's what I was pushing at the very beginning to help you understand that foundation. But now, does that mean that we are not put forth any effort in our Christian life? No. That's not what that means.

Our salvation, theologically what is called monergistic. It's one. It's God oriented; God saves us but our sanctification, our spiritual growth, becoming like Christ is synergistic. We now put forth our will, our actions, our desires along with God's power that we might live to please Him; that we might live to glorify Him. But here's the key. That power is not in and of ourselves. That sense, that desire to be like Christ comes from God himself. And so Paul says there are going to be times when you struggle with sin. There are going to be times when you are at war with the flesh but your greatest desire will actually be to walk in righteousness. Because of that there are certain things that you are going to have to deconstruct in your life from the old lifestyle and reconstruct for the new lifestyle. And that's what we've been talking about.

Last week I took you to verse 17 of Ephesians, chapter 4 where Paul says you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. Do you remember what the word Gentiles refers to? It refers to those who do not know God. You could define that in the very narrow sense as someone who is a Gentile, who is not a Jew or in the broadest sense which is what this passage is clearly taking and that is someone who does not know God. And so what Paul is saying you're not to act like that. You're not to walk as someone who does not know God. What does that look like? Well, you remember? He tells us. Verse 17, he says first of all their thinking in the futility of their minds. Their thinking is like those who do not know God. Verse 18, they are hardened in their understanding. In other words, their reasoning is like one who does not know God. Verse 19, they have become callous. In other words, they're past feelings. They no longer feel remorse over any type of sin, or wickedness or any type of unrighteousness that is in their life. Not only that but they've given themselves up. In other words, they're all in to sensuality, greedy to practice any kind of impurity. That is referring to their actions. So, their thinking, their reasoning, their feelings, their actions are like those who do not know God.

But now, look at verse 20. What does Paul say? But this is not the way you learn Christ. Here is the transition. You are not to be Gentile-like in your lifestyle. You are to be Christ-like in your lifestyle. And that's what we're going to look at today. Paul has basically moved us through the deconstruction. We now know what we're not to be. We're not to be Gentile-like; those who act like they don't know God. We are to be Christ-like. So he begins to set up for us the reconstruction of our walk.

Let's begin. We're going to look at verses 20 through 24 this morning. He writes but this is not the way you learn Christ assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus, 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

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your minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Do you hear what he's saying? Let me unpack it for you. Paul begins the reconstruction by first stating an assumption. Do you see the assumption? He says, this is what I'm assuming, that you, verse 20, learned Christ. Verse 21, heard about Him and were taught in Him. He is saying you will be Christ-like if you have true faith in Him; if you truly are a believer. It is now a part of your genetic code. God has reprogrammed you to now have a desire to be like Christ rather than to be like one who does not know God. You will, look he says, learn Christ, you will have heard about Christ and you will be taught in Him. What he is doing here is he is creating an image of a saving relationship.

You're going through your life, through some aspect of your life and you start looking at it and you think I wonder if I'm really saved. Have you ever done that? Have you ever wondered, I wonder if I'm truly a believer? Of course you have. We've all done that. I've done that. One of the greatest ways to move past that is to look at the examples of a saving relationship and there are three verbs in this text that give us that example; that give us that image. Let me just walk you through it.

The first verb, *emathete* in the Greek means you learned Christ. Now look at that. What is interesting about that? What seems odd about that that you learned Christ? You don't learn normally a person right? You learn about something or you learn some type of facts or you learn some type of theology. You learn some type of doctrine but that's not what Paul is saying. He is making this very personal. This is first hand personal knowledge. You learned Christ. Here's what He's saying. You know Christ because it's a part of your life. You understand His forgiveness. You understand His grace. You understand His mercy. You understand His renewal in your life on a continued basis. You, what's it say, you learned Christ. There's a personal aspect? Is that true of your life? Or is Christ more just like a religion? Paul's saying, that's not what a true believer will be. A true believer will be all in because they have learned in a personal way this man, Jesus Christ.

Not only that, the second verb, you heard Him. Now notice the text here says you heard about Him; assuming that you heard about Him. I take issue with the ESV translation here because literally this verb is you heard Him. That's it. You personally heard Him. That's the sense. Not like in an audible way but rather you were moved by Him. That could have been when you were reading scripture. You're reading and the pages of scripture just come to life for you and it's as if Christ is a new aspect of Christ that you're hearing Him speak into your life. Or a teacher or a pastor or someone who is helping you understand the scriptures says something and it's as if they're speaking directly to you. You ever had that happen? I've had that happen. I've sat where you've sat. I've listened to someone and it's as if they're speaking right into my life as if they know my life. And what is that? Well, that's the Spirit of God intertwining His word. It's a sense of we've heard Jesus speak to us personally. Or it happens through a mentor; someone who's guiding you into a deeper understanding.

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That certainly was true in my life. I really didn't become a follower of Christ until I was about twenty-one. Now I had a Christian influence all throughout my life and so I really can't explain exactly how it happened other than it's God's divine providence and sovereignty when I came to truly know Him. I grew up in what I call a semi-Christian environment. My mom and dad were Chreasters. They went to church on Christmas and Easter. That was about it. But now we had Christian influence all around us. My grandmother, a devoted follower of Christ. My great-grandfather was a pastor. He started his last church in his eighties. My great-great grandfather and so on, we have several generations of pastors in our family line. I went to Mansfield Christian school but still I never had a personal relationship with Christ until I was about twenty-one. And just to be transparent with you I received Christ in a bar across town. The bars name was Diablo which means devil, which I think is rather ironic but a man who was just leading me to understand who Jesus was in a much deeper way was there that night – followed me there to sit down to have further conversations with me and it was at just a point in my life where what he was saying was becoming very real to me. Later, he introduced me to his pastor, a man by the name of Craig Snyder. Craig was a pastor of a little church called Maranatha Grace Brethren Church which was small, almost like a house church over where Lowes sits now. Its now long since gone but I remember Craig having an incredible influence on my life. Me and about four or five others he would invited over to his living room and there we would all sit, bibles open and he was teaching some of the fundamentals about what it meant to follow this living Savior. And I remember those early days. Everything was just so raw, so real. It was as if I was hearing Jesus intertwined speak to me through the Word and through this man who was teaching me. Ironically, I think one of the great highlights I'll remember for this year was actually last week. This man Craig Snyder, I haven't seen since the day I got married showed up here at the church unannounced. He and his wife drove four hours round trip to be here and when I saw him there was just a flood of emotions that came back because here was the man that God used to help me understand Jesus in a personal way. And that's what Paul's trying to communicate. You heard Him. You literally, not about Him – you heard Him.

But not only that the third verb. You were taught in Him. Not taught about Him. Not taught by Him. You were completely enveloped in Him. He became a part of your life. He said, Paul says you are no longer to walk as Gentiles because of this fact; because you know Jesus personally and because Jesus knows you personally that should impact every aspect of your life. And so when people say to me, I don't know. I don't know if I'm a true Christian or not. I always ask well, does your life reflect someone who knows Jesus Christ personally? Say, well, what does that look like? Well, that's what Paul tells us in these next three verses. In verse 22, 23, and 24 he gives us the three absolutes of the believer.

Now, if you're going to take notes there are going to be three, three absolutes which will illustrate our true faith. Number one is that I put off the old actions, the old self. I put off

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the actions of the old self. Verse 22. Put off your old self, he says, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. Paul says it makes no sense to continue in that former manner of life because it's over. That's not you. It's as if your life was taken off by Christ and a new life was put on almost like it was a garment. In fact, that is the best imagery of the text that Christ has taken off your old self and put on you a new self. He wants you to live like this and so now what is the imperative? Is that is we are to continue taking off the desires of that old life and to remember that we have a new life and we are to put those desires on.

I was trying to think how can I visualize this for them and I thought the best way to do that is just with the sense of the text and so I brought my old, burned coat. Literally, this is old. I actually I was a little embarrassed about the way it looked and actually it's smells like diesel fuel and it's got tractor grease on it. It smells like our barn, literally. It's just an old coat. And I want you to think, this is a picture of your old life. This is just your old. You know, you wouldn't wear this to some place nice. You would want to take this off and put something on. You know what Paul is saying is that's exactly what Jesus has done. He took your old life off you like a coat. So don't go back to it any more. Don't go back to your old life because He's taken that off and He's put on you a new life. I have a new barn coat that doesn't have the grease stains and the smells and picture this. This is like what God has done for you. He's clothed you now in righteousness and holiness. He says this is now how you should be acting. This should represent the new life.

In fact, just hold your place in Ephesians for a moment. Come over to the parallel passage of Colossians chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3 you get a picture of what Paul was saying in detail like only you seen scantily in Ephesians. Here is just a parallel concept, same theological premise he tells to the Colossians in chapter 3, verse 1. I'm going to start reading. You catch up. He says, if then you've been raised with Christ. In other words, if you know Him personally seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above not only things that are on the earth. Verse 3, for you've died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears then you also will appear with Him in glory. Which, by the way is a great promise for eternity. Put to death, therefore what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them. But now, you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth, do not lie to one another. By the way, these are things you can not do on your own power. You can try but you will be frustrated. He says, this is what you do when Christ is taken off the old coat, the old life and put on the new. You will no longer want to have the desires to do these things. He says, middle of verse 9, seeing that you have put off the old self with it's practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of it's creator.

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Do you see what Paul is saying? He is saying this is the new you, not that. That's your old life. That's the old way of thinking. That's the old way of reasoning. That's the old way of acting. This is the new life so put that on. He says don't go back to those deceitful desires. I love that. You know what that is? That is a promise with the idea that you once practiced something that promised you to deliver something that you would enjoy but never did? And isn't that sin? Sin promises you something but it can not deliver. It promises you some thrill, some feeling, some great aspiration of life. Never delivers. It's a deceitful desire.

But there are times, aren't there? When we want to put on that old coat. There are times we want to put on that old life, isn't there? That's what Paul says is the fight of the flesh. There are times when we want to go back to it and we try and we say, ok, I'm going to just test that out and so we try to put that old life over our new and it just didn't fit. In fact, it doesn't even feel right. Let's be honest. There are times when we get involved with unrighteousness, sinful practices and what does it make you feel like? It makes you feel unclean because that was the old, unclean life. But we have a wonderful God. A God who gives us great grace. I love to take people to 1 John 1:9. When as a believer they have fallen into sin and to read to them that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to, what? Cleanse us from all unrighteousness. See, that's the promise to you as a believer. You are clean. This is how God sees you now. Yes, there will be times you are tempted and you will fall and during those times you confess that to your Savior and He will cleanse you again. But, as a totality, as a person – you're new. You've put on the new you and so he says put off the actions of the old and renew the spirit of your minds.

That's the second point. I renew the spirit of my mind. How do I do that? What does that mean? Look at that. It's in verse 23. He says I want you to renew the spirit of you mind. How do you do that? That's one of the most awkward phrases in scripture. In fact, it's the only place it appears in the New Testament. And it's not very clear. Is the spirit the Holy Spirit, the human spirit or some new way of thinking? I can tell you this. The verb, be renewed is a present passive infinitive and what that means it's a continual action which means you are to continually be doing this. You are continually renewing the spirit of you minds. But what does that mean? Let me just read a passage to you. Let's see if you pick up on it. You don't have to turn there. It's found in Colossians 3:16. Write that down. He says, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one other in all wisdom, singing songs and hymns, spiritual psalms with thanksgiving in your hearts to God. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Do you know how you renew your mind? You go to the Word of God. You want to have the mind of God? You go to the Word of God. That's how you renew your mind. Beside renewed is the idea of the essence of your thinking. How do you change your actions? You change your thinking. How do you change your thinking? You let it be renewed by the Spirit, by the Word of God. The essence of your thinking – it's living, it's sharper, it's active than any two edged sword. It will pierce down deep. It will change you from the inside you but you

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have to submit to it. See, you want to be a person of faith? You submit to the Word of God.

Have you ever read through the scriptures and you're thinking where did these people get such remarkable faith? I do that? I can look at someone like Noah. Why would Noah build a boat in the middle of basically a desert region? You can't even see water. Or why would Abraham who was told by God to go and sacrifice his son Isaac. Isaac was the promised seed of Israel. He was the long awaited promise that God said would come but now God is saying go and sacrifice him? Why would Abraham even saddle his donkey and prepared and go to do it? Or why would Moses, after being released from bondage take the people of Israel when he knows that the Egyptian nation are bearing down behind them. Why would he follow God's Word to run towards the Red Sea? You would think he would pull out his GPS and move to the south or to the North and say, God, you know the Red Sea, I'm going to, we're going to be boxed in. Why would he go there? He had no idea that God was about to part the Red Sea. Why would, in the New Testament, why would Peter when Jesus said step out of the boat, why would he throw his legs over the boat and do it?

One of my favorite Old Testament acts of faith comes from a man named Gideon. It's found in Judges chapter 7. You don't need to turn there. Let me just tell you the story. Judges, chapter 7, Gideon is now the man in charge of Israel. It was during an era where it wasn't led by a king but rather, the nation was led by judges and Gideon happened to be a judge at this particular time. The Mideonites, one-hundred and twenty-thousand swordsman strong, the scriptures say, were now coming to do battle with the children of Israel who were thirty-two thousand strong. They were out numbered four to one. God calls Gideon to the side and says there are too many of you. I want this battle to about, not your strength but about my strength so I want you listen to me. I want you go before the warriors and I want you to tell them that if anybody is frightened they can go home. Can you imagine that? Hundred and twenty thousand Mideonites about ready to bear down on you. You are outnumbered four to one. You have thirty-two thousand. You stand before your men and say, by the way, an army is approaching, a huge army but if you're scared and you're afraid you can just go home. Can you imagine saying that? Twenty-two thousand take him up on it and skidattle out of there. Ten thousand. Imagine being Gideon. God says to him, still, too many people. Take them down to the Harod Spring and anybody who gets down on all fours and laps like a dog, rather than those that get down on one knee and drink with their hand. Anybody who laps like a dog send them home. Now, imagine being in Gideon's position right here as he's walking down to the Spring of Harod. He's just hoping, he's praying oh please, let them all just kneel. Don't let anyone get down. Nine-thousand, seven-hundred of them get down on all fours and start lapping like dogs. He's got to send them home. Now he's down to three-hundred people. Three-hundred people and he's going to go up against a hundred and twenty-thousand Mideonites. What would make him even think about going into battle with those odds? You ask the question. What made him be obedient? You say, what happened

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to the war? Well, you have to find that out for yourself. You're going to have to go to Judges chapter 7 and read that later. That's not the point? Why did Gideon do it? Why? Because he heard the voice of God.

You say, well, I would do anything that God told me to do if I heard His voice. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you do just anything God told you if you could just hear His voice? You have heard His voice. It's the Word of God. That's the whole point. In this economy, in the church era God says, I am speaking to you by the Word of God. Do it. Renew your mind. You want to act like a follower of Christ? Think like a follower of Christ by knowing the Word. Get under someone. Have them teach it to you. Get into a bible study, a small group, take a University Class, do something to try to get this into here because it will change the way you act. It will renew the spirit of your mind.

And then you're ready for the third point and that it I put on the actions of the new self. I put on the actions of the new coat that was given to me. And what are those actions? Well, he tells us in verse 24 to put on the new self, look at this, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Isn't that cool? You want to be like God? You were created in the likeness of God. Then put on the actions of the new self which are righteousness and holiness. What is the first sign that is happening in your life? What is the first indication that you are truly putting on the actions of the new self. I'll tell you the first sign – obedience. You will obey God's Word. It might not make sense but you will obey God's Word. It will be a characteristic of your life. You will obey God's Word.

Here in just a few moments, we're going to see a living example of people who took obedience to baptism seriously. But you know you can apply this to anything in your life. What is God calling you to do? Do it. Put off the old. Renew the mind. Put on the new. Obey. Let's pray together.