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Series: *In Christ - ONE*

Title: *"The Ultimate Fixer Upper"*

Text: Ephesians 4:17-32

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How many of you have heard of Chip and Joanna Gaines?

Sure, pretty much all of us have. This Christian couple became popular with their FIXER-UPPER television show. They renovated most of the homes in Waco, Texas---and now have become best-selling authors; they have their own magazine; they have a line of home products in Target---not to mention the fact that they own several successful businesses in Waco.

Now, I'm not an HGTV fan---but I really enjoyed their show. It was fun to see and hear Chip's humor---his joy on DEMOLITION day where they sledge-hammer the house in prep for renovation.

And my favorite part was the BIG-REVEAL. They would have a nearly life-sized picture of the house BEFORE renovation. The homeowners would stand in front of it---while Chip took one side and Joanna the other. Then they would say, "Are you ready to see your new home?" And then they'd pull the huge picture apart---and the couple would jump up and down or break down into tears of joy as they saw the change!

I thought of Chip and Joanna because in our text Paul talks about fixing up---not houses---but people. I'm talking about the change that Paul says takes place in an individual when they decide to follow Christ as Savior and Lord for, as Paul puts it in 2nd Corinthians 5:17,

"If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come."

Now in the FIXER UPPER show---once the reno is done Chip and Joanna leave---they move on to other projects. But when we ask Christ to forgive us and come in and make us new people---Christ the "Contractor" never leaves the job. We're never on our own. From the moment we put our faith in Him Jesus is always with us guiding and empowering us to continually change for the better as we become more and more like Him.

Take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 4 and listen as I read verses 17-32 where Paul describes the kind of change that a personal relationship with Jesus makes possible.

Ephesians 4:17-32

17 – So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

18 – They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

19 – Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

20 – You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.

21 – Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

22 – You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

23 – to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

24 – and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 – Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

26 – "In your anger do not sin:" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

27 – and do not give the devil a foothold.

28 – He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

29 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

30 – And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 – Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

32 – Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Okay, let's go back and look more closely at the kind of "fixer-upper" renovation that Paul talks about. I mean, what kind of change does "Contractor Jesus" make possible? It's quite extensive! For example,

1.) Jesus fixes us up so we can THINK rightly.

Look at verses 17 and 18 where Paul says, ***"I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the FUTILITY OF THEIR THINKING. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."***

Notice the words and phrases Paul uses to describe how we USED to think—before we let Christ transform our mind set—before we asked Him to correct our world view. Back then, there was ***"futility"*** in our thinking. We were ***"ignorant."*** But with His indwelling power we don't have to embrace the world's futile thinking anymore. We don't have to be darkened in our understanding. If we let Him, Jesus will help us to think and perceive RIGHTLY.

A. He demolishes SELFISH thinking and installs SELFLESS thinking.

Before we met Christ our tendency was to think in the opposite way---self first. This is an ignorant, futile way of thinking because not only does it result in our belittling, and even hurting others---it leads us to loneliness and purposelessness.

Jesus described the benefits of this kind of RIGHT thinking when He said, ***"Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's sake shall save it."*** (Mark 8:35)

In other words, when Jesus comes in He helps us to see that the focusing on self is not best way to approach life. We lose our lives when we think that way. The only way to save your life—the only way to literally GET A LIFE---the only way to beat our loneliness and feel fulfilled---is to focus on others. Putting their needs above your own—GIVING to help others—this is the right way to think.

I remember an episode in the old TV Series TAXI that underscored this principle. You---more mature people---remember TAXI. It aired in the late '70's and was the show that launched the careers of lots of famous actors including Christopher Lloyd. I mean, if there had been no Taxi --- I doubt there would have been a *Back to the Future!*

In this old sitcom Lloyd played a character named Jim whose mind wasn't quite all there, and as you can see, he looked the part. But one episode showed at least part of Jim's brain was working correctly. You see, his wealthy father died and left Jim millions of dollars. In the weeks following the funeral, Jim's Taxi-driving friends learned that he was giving money away right and left. He was helping anyone who asked. They worried about him ending up destitute, so they told him he needed to stop doing that kind of thing. They said, ***"Jim---you need to think more about yourself!"*** Jim heard them out, but he told them it brought him great joy to help other people with his new-found wealth and then he issued them a challenge. He gave them each a thousand dollars. They were to give it away to one needy person and if it didn't bring them great joy, Jim promised to stop giving away his wealth.

The episode was built on little vignettes where each of his friends used the money to bless others and every single one of those taxi drivers came back to say, ***"Jim you were right. It is fun to help others. You are THINKING correctly! Keep up the good work!"***

Well, this old TV show underscored an eternal Christian principle. Real LIFE---I'm talking ABUNDANT life---is found in focusing on OTHERS not on self---and Jesus can empower this kind of right thinking. He can fix us up in this way.

Here's a second way Jesus can help FIX UP our thinking.

B. He demolishes WORLDLY thinking and installs ETERNAL thinking.

Jesus shows us that the temporary things of this world never satisfy. I'm reminded of an old Jewish saying:

"Who so craveth wealth is like a man who drinks salt water. The more he drinks the more he increases his thirst and he ceases not until he perishes."

Do you remember how Jesus addressed this principle with His first followers? In Mark 8 our Lord asked Peter and the others: **"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"** The obvious answer is NOTHING because material things never bring us any real lasting profit in life! They don't give us lasting joy. As Paul says in verse 19 material things leave us thirsting for more.

You may have heard the tragic story of the sinking of the USS Indianapolis toward the end of WW2. On July 30, 1945--- just a couple weeks before the Japanese surrendered, the battle cruiser USS Indianapolis was returning from delivering the atomic bomb to allied forces in the Pacific. The ship never made it home. A Japanese torpedo hit the cruiser on its way back. It sank in 12 minutes, 300 of the 1,200 men died in the sinking. The other nine hundred went into the ocean and endured four days and five nights without food or water, suffering under the blazing sun of the Pacific. Of those 900 only 316 survived the lack of water and food not to mention the sharks. One of the survivors was the chief medical officer who recorded his experience. He wrote:

"There was nothing I could do, nothing I could do but give advice, bury the dead at sea and save the lifejackets and try to keep the men from drinking the water. When the hot sun came out, and we were in this cool, crystal-clear ocean, we were so thirsty. You couldn't believe the sea water wasn't good enough to drink. I had a hard time convincing the men they shouldn't drink it. The real young ones---you take away their hope, you take away their water and food, they would drink the salt water and they would go fast. I can remember striking those who were drinking the salt water to try to stop them. They would get dehydrated, then become maniacal. There were mass hallucinations. Even I fought the hallucinations off and on. Something always brought me back."

In our text Paul is behaving like this medical officer. He's saying, *"Don't drink the waters of this world! It will seem crystal clear. It will seem to slake your thirst. It will taste so good. But it is poison. It will harden your hearts. It will deaden your minds. It will leave you thirsty---you will have this continual desire for MORE. It will even poison your relationship with Jesus."*

Paul's point is, if we let Him, "CONTRACTOR JESUS" comes in and fixes this flawed kind of thinking. He helps us to THINK right when it comes to the things of this world.

There's one final example of the way that Jesus can fix up our THINKING.

C. He demolishes DESPAIR and installs HOPE.

This is why maturing Christ-followers tend to be more optimistic even in the most terrifying times of life! They know that the Scriptures are full of promises that fuel this kind of thinking. Here's some examples. I've paraphrased them into the form of scripturally based thoughts we can embrace with Jesus' help:

- Romans 8:28 – **"God is working in all things for my good."**
- Philippians 1:6 – **"Christ will finish the work He has begun in me."**
- Isaiah 38:17 – **"God has turned His back on my sin."**
- Hebrews 13:5 – **"God will never turn His back on me."**
- Ephesians 1:5 – **"I belong to God and that will never change."**
- 2nd Corinthians 9:8 – **"With God, I have access to everything I need."**
- Ephesians 1:8 – **"My future is bright!"**
- Ephesians 3:19 – **"Living in God's love is the key to living in power."**

Is that great FIXER UPPER work or what?! Jesus renovates our souls by changing the way we THINK. If we let Him, He will empower us such that we no longer embrace futile thinking---ignorant---worldly thinking. With His help and guidance we begin to think right.

But THINKING is not the extent of the FIXER UPPER change He makes possible.

2.) When we allow Him, Jesus fixes us up so we FEEL rightly.

As verses 18 and 19 say, if we are not careful, our hearts become hardened to the point that we lose all sensitivity to the hurts of others. But when we listen to our “CONTRACTOR”---when we heed Jesus’ still, small voice---that changes. Jesus softens our hearts and keeps them that way.

For example:

- When we heard about all the people who lost their lives in the flood waters of Eastern Kentucky, a month ago we FEEL their pain---their loss---their grief in our gut.
- When we read the latest news on the war in the Ukraine and see entire apartment complexes destroyed by Russian bombs---we hurt for those families who no longer have a home.
- When we see those ads for St. Jude’s Hospital that pop up on our phones---where they share pictures of children with cancer it makes us want to cry.

Let me put it this way, the more JESUS’ heart beats in our chest, the more our hearts break for others. The more we let Jesus do His work—the more we weep for the hurting people in this world—even the people who suffer for their own poor choices. When we let Jesus fix the way we feel, instead of judging them:

- We hurt for the people who get abortions.
- We grieve for the people who embrace a same-sex life-style.
- We weep for couples who decided to end their marriages.
We FEEL compassion for them—because we know their choices will not bring them the joy they could have in this life. This principle is seen in the way we FEEL about all sin.
- With Jesus working in us, we begin to HURT for the gossips and the liars and the adulterers.
- We grieve for the prideful people and the self-centered people.

I mean, Jesus will help us to FEEL differently about people—all people. And that’s a good thing because when we FEEL right, we respond RIGHT. Our feeling motivates us to pray and give and work to help others.

A second way this wrong-feeling—this callousness—manifests itself is when it comes to our OWN sin.

You see, when we IGNORE our Lord’s “fixer upper” guidance---we get to the point where we no longer FEEL bad about those times we do things we know God doesn’t want us to do and the times we don’t do what we know He DOES want us to do. We don’t feel right---we become callous to our own sinful disobedience.

This week I read about a man who had some pretty serious sin problems in his life and the Lord was dealing with him about it. He didn’t want to acknowledge the Lord, so he went to the doctor. When the doctor asked him what the trouble was, he told him, *“I haven’t been living right, Doc. My conscience is really bothering me.”* The doctor said, *“So, I guess you want something like a pill that will strengthen your willpower?”* The man looked at him funny and said, *“No, I was looking for something that would weaken my conscience.”*

Well, we don’t need a pill—because the more we ignore our God-given conscience, the easier it is to do so. As Christians we are forgiven---not perfect---and without Jesus working in us---empowering us---guiding us---our sense of right and wrong can quickly become distorted.

You see, when we do wrong things, we have two options. We can admit that what we have done is wrong—or we can justify our sin—and we are all guilty of the latter. See if any of these justifications feel familiar:

- *“Well, it’s OK. It didn’t really hurt anybody.”*

- *“But I really needed to get a good grade.”*
- *“Nobody will miss it if I only take one—besides look what I’ve given them over the years.”*
- *“Everybody’s doing it.”*

Embracing excuses like this is like getting a pill from the doctor that takes away guilt. After a while it works pretty-well when it comes to quieting our conscience. But guess what happens? Pretty soon, people get like Paul described. They get beyond feeling. They grow numb to sin.

You know, pretty much everyone ELSE in my family LOVES spicy food. Not me: salt, a little pepper, ketchup, mayonnaise, yellow mustard—that’s about as spicy as I get. So, when I eat even the mildest burrito at Chipotle, the top of my head breaks out in a cold sweat and my lips feel like they are on fire. But Daniel and Ashley and Sue and Becca and Andrew and Joe and Sarah—they have put so many different hot sauces in their mouths that the things that bother my sensitive taste glands don’t even phase theirs.

- How many of you are like me?
- How many of you are like my family—you like hot stuff?

Well eating spicy things is not a sin—in fact, I think it’s probably good for you. I noticed the other day that hot sauces don’t have expiration dates—I guess in the same way the spices kill tastebuds—they kill bacteria.

My point is the same way that we can become insensitive to jalapeno peppers—we can become insensitive to sin. I mean, when we are little children we have very tender consciences but as we grow, we begin to learn how to justify our sin—and over time our conscience begins to become seared. It’s not as sensitive as it was, and it becomes easier to ignore Jesus. But when we listen to Jesus—when we allow Him to do His fixer up stuff, sinning makes us feel guilt and shame. We learn to listen when the Holy Spirit pricks our conscience. We confess our sin instead of justifying it or covering it up.

So—Jesus fixes us such that we THINK differently and FEEL differently...

3.) Finally, He fixes us up so that we learn to ACT rightly.

Look at verses 25-31 where Paul says, ***“Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor. In your anger do not sin: He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 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 in Christ God forgave you.”***

Paul has a LOT to say when it comes to Jesus’ desire to transform our actions because when it comes to fixing us up—our actions are where the rubber meets the road! So, what does Paul say?

A. Jesus demolishes LYING LIPS and installs a TRUTHFUL TONGUE.

This is a change that is greatly needed in a lot of people because lying, deceit, spin—whatever you call it—is so prevalent in our world. Here’s a list I came across this week that illustrates this point. It’s called *“Famous American Fibs”* and it highlights the deceit we embrace these days:

- *“I’ll start my diet tomorrow.”*
- *“Give me your number and the doctor will call you right back.”*
- *“Money cheerfully refunded.”*
- *“One size fits all.”*
- *“Your luggage isn’t lost; it’s only misplaced.”*
- *“I just need five minutes of your time.”*
- *“Open wide, this won’t hurt a bit.”*
- ---and my favorite, *“Permanent press.”*

We chuckle but lying is no laughing matter—because deceit destroys relationships—including our relationships with other Christians in our church family.

In verse 25 Paul says, that we must speak truthfully to each other in the church, ***“for we are all members of ONE BODY.”***

Now, think about it. What would happen if your physical body lied to your brain? Let’s say your FINGER is touching a hot stove and says to the brain, *“This doesn’t burn! No damage being done here.”* Then all of a sudden, your nose asks your finger: *“Then why do I smell burning flesh?”*

What if your eyes lied to your brain about when it was safe to walk across a busy street? You get the point---to be healthy a body has to be truthful. And the same is true of the church body.

When we don’t love each other enough to be truthful---especially when it comes to those difficult conversations where we ***“speak the truth in love”*** ---trying to help a brother or sister who is heading down the wrong road. Without truth---that part of the body suffers. And as Paul says in his letter to the church at Corinth, when one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it. Truth spoken in love---keeps our body healthy and strong.

Here’s a second way Jesus fixes up our “acting.”

B. He demolishes UNCONTROLLED WRATH and installs RIGHTEOUS ANGER.

Remember, not all anger NEEDS fixing. It is right to get angry about the right things. For example, we should get angry about child abuse and angry when we see strife and division in the church---angry when we see people dragging down the name of Christ with their behavior.

Those things should make us angry just like Jesus got angry when He saw the temple being turned into a money-making facility---or when the disciples tried to run off all the children who had come to see Jesus.

We SHOULD be angry about injustice. These are examples of righteous anger---good anger. The kind of anger we need Jesus to fix is when we try to hurt instead of help. It’s that form of anger that leads us to sin. Paul says that when we see ourselves crossing the line into anger-fueled sin we must ask for our Lord’s help right away. We mustn’t let the sun go down until we’ve resolved things.

Now, this familiar text addresses two things.

First, Paul is saying get it worked out before too much time passes and it festers. The devil will take advantage of that kind of procrastination. But Paul is also using the idea of the sun going down as a metaphor for illumination. In other words, don’t turn the light off on your anger. Don’t hide it or cover it up. Let Jesus in you shine His light on it and expose it so you can see why you are angry.

- Is it selfishness?
- Is it hurt feelings?
- Is it pride?

Ask Jesus to show you the cause so you can then repent and get His help in ridding yourself of sinful wrath and the hurtful actions that come with it.

Here’s a third way Jesus fixes up our actions.

C. He demolishes STEALING and installs SHARING.

Now, I would bet that most of us would never consider ourselves to be a thief. I mean, “thief” is such an ugly word. Nobody likes people who steal—Even people who don’t follow Jesus feel this way. But the fact is we all steal stuff all the time.

- We steal other people’s joy when we treat them badly.
- We steal from our boss when we waste time on the job.
- We steal from our families when we don’t give them the time and the love they need.

- We steal from the government when we cheat on our taxes.
- We steal from the church when we don't serve God with the gifts He's given us.
- We steal from God when we don't willingly and cheerfully give our tithes and offerings.

But when we allow Him, Jesus fixes us. A transformed person---a Jesus-renovated person---works hard to give instead of take---works hard to serve instead of steel---works hard to share the blessings of God with those who are in need.

Here's a final way Jesus fixes up our actions.

D. He demolishes DESTRUCTIVE words and installs CONSTRUCTIVE words.

Now when you think about it, our speech can only be used in two ways. Our words can either bless or to curse---they can build up or tear down. And in my lifetime---our culture has embraced more of the latter and less of the former.

I remember reading about a foul-mouthed comedian back in the early '70s who came up with a whole routine based on the seven words you can't say on television. He was arrested for performing that routine---but now all the words he used except one are regularly heard on TV. And---please understand it's not the curse words that are so bad---it's the "regular words" that we tend to use to hurt others---the gossip---the innuendo---the critical words that tear a person to pieces---the slander---the email bombs and social media grenades that ruin someone's day.

Listen, Christian, our speech must not only be pure---It must be edifying.

Let me just ask:

- *How many of you in this room have ever been hurt by the words of others?*
- *How many of you have used your words---written or spoken---to hurt?*

All hands should be up both times! Well, listen, Paul says that destructive words actually grieve the Holy Spirit Who lives in you. He has sealed your salvation and is deeply saddened and hurt any time you use your words destructively.

Obviously, we all need Jesus' fixer-upper help in this area. We need to pray with the Psalmist, "***Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.***" (Psalm 141:3) We need to let Jesus not just change our hearts---we need to let Him change our mouths! Jesus can fix our ACTIONS---even our verbal ones. He can help us to use our words to BUILD UP others.

Most of the time when we see how a transformed person is supposed to act, we fall short. We still struggle with sin. But that's just the point. We struggle with it. Prior to being transformed in Christ, the old us doesn't struggle with sin.

- He can't help but lie.
- He can't help but show unrighteous wrath.
- He can't help but steal.
- He can't help but use corrupt words.

But when Jesus saves us, we can help it. With Him IN US---we feel convicted of sin. With Him working IN US we have the power to resist temptation to sin in our lives. With Him working IN US we learn to confess and repent of our sin and set up safeguards, so we don't do it again.

Jesus is the TRUE Fixer-upper!

Let's pray.