

The Renewal Process

Ephesians 4:17-32

DT- You are what you think.

Last week in the first part of Ephesians 4 Paul explained how good people make good churches and good churches make good people. Paul does not want to just mention that fact, give you an illustration of good people and good churches and then wish you luck. In the second half of Ephesians 4 he describes the renewal process every Christian must go through on a continual basis for unity in the church to be maintained. Let's pray and then we will see how he describes this renewal process.

PRAY

In Henry David Thoreau's book, *Walden*, he describes an interesting custom of the Mucclasse Indians. Once every year the Mucclasse would have what's called a busk. They would celebrate the busk by making themselves new clothes, new pots, new pans, new household utensils, even new furniture. They would go through their homes and sweep and clean them out. Then they would collect all their old worn-out clothes, and utensils, and furniture; even the old grain and throw it into one big heaping pile. Then they would light that pile on fire.

For 3 days they would fast and abstain from food and any kind of pleasure while the fire burned everything up. Then the fire would be extinguished and on the 4th morning they would wash and put on those new clothes they made. The chief would start a fresh fire and from that flame each family would take a burning stick home to start their own fire. The busk would last for 3 more days as they celebrated the old being gone and the new being here.

Thoreau believed that this tribe was directly inspired by heaven to perform this renewal process even though they didn't have the written word of God. That may or may not be true. What is true is that this busk festival, has some similarities to the language Paul uses in Ephesians 4 when he speaks about the renewal process followers of Christ should be going through as they mature and grow.

The Muclasse Indians got rid of the old to put on the new. Paul uses that same language to describe our old nature compared to the new nature we have in Christ. Paul begins this discussion by pointing out the old sinful nature using the Gentiles as a picture for that. Ephesians 4:17-19 says, "With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds

and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.”

Paul really paints the Gentiles in a pretty bad light there. He’s not talking about the Gentile Christians of course, but this is how the non-Christian Gentiles lived during this time. It’s not any different from some people in our culture today. Paul says the reason they can’t see and are hopelessly confused is not because their eyes are blinded; it’s because their minds are closed, and their hearts are hardened. That’s why they can’t think clearly about spiritual matters.

So they just keep living their lives with no shame, chasing after every lustful pleasure they can as they practice every kind of impurity. Paul says, with the Lord’s authority, don’t you dare live like the Gentiles. Instead, Paul says, like the Muclasse Indians, it’s out with the old.

1. Out with the old.

Get rid of that old life, that old way of living. Throw it in a pile and burn it if that’s what it takes. Paul says in Ephesians 4:20-22, “But that isn’t what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.”

Your old way of life is ruled and reigned by sin because it is corrupted by lust and deception. Get rid of it. Throw it away like you throw away old worn-out clothes. This idea of getting rid of the old, getting rid of the dead, because your sinful nature should be put to death; has a connection with what Jesus said to those around Lazarus when he raised him from the dead.

Jesus has raised Lazarus from that dead and everyone is standing around amazed as they should be and then John 11:44 says, “And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

Take the grave clothes off him because he’s not dead he’s alive. Get rid of the dead stuff, get rid of the wrappings of the dead. Out with the old. Lazarus doesn’t need that anymore he’s not dead, he’s alive. The same is true, or should be true, about our sinful nature. It’s dead, it’s gone, we don’t need it anymore so out with the old. Instead, Paul says it’s in with the new.

2. In with the new.

You’ve got new clothes to put on, you’ve got a new nature that is like Christ. Ephesians 4:23-24 says, “Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”

That's what we need. We need the Spirit to renew us so we can put on that new nature that is like God. God has done an incredible work in you and through you. Live out of that transformation you are experiencing. Stop going back to old nature. Proverbs 26:11 says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his foolishness."

That's a pretty gross picture, thank you Solomon for that disgusting illustration. But I would guess most of us in here have seen a dog do that. It's nasty and disgusting and I'm completely ruining your appetite for lunch, but that's what we do when we foolishly repeat the same sin over and over. Trying to put that old nature back on when we have been given a new nature that is created by God to be righteous and holy.

Get rid of that old nature and enjoy the new nature you have through Christ. Ross I'd really like to do that, but I just don't know how. That's no problem the text tells us how to do it. You let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Start with your thoughts. You must renew your mind.

- Renew your mind.

This transformation from old to new starts in your mind. As your mind begins to understand the truth of God's word it gradually transforms, and that renewal leads to a changed life. Romans 12:2 (NIV) says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

It all starts in the mind. This renewal process has to begin there because you are what you think. In Paul's day the Greeks had this philosophy called dualism. Dualism taught that the actions of the body had no effect on the inner man. They believed the mind and the body were separate. Your mind didn't have any effect on the body and what you did with your body didn't have any effect on the mind.

That's just wrong. Anyone with common sense knows that is completely not true. You are what you think and what you think absolutely affects what you do with your body. Not only does common sense prove that wrong but so does scripture where John writes this in 1 John 3:7-8, "Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning."

People will show you whether their minds have been renewed. They show you through their actions and their attitudes. John says when people do what is right you will be able to visually see them doing righteous things. When people keep on sinning it shows in their actions that they still belong to the devil.

To get rid of the old and bring in the new nature you must renew your mind. Paul says the next step of renewal has to do with your attitude or the actions you portray to others. So you renew the mind and then you retrain your body.

- Retrain your body.

You retrain your body and your actions to fit the renewed mind you now have because of the new nature God gave you through Christ in the Spirit. Think of it like a carving. When you carve something you chip away all the parts that don't fit the vision for what you want to make. To retrain the body, we need to chip away all the parts of our life that don't look like Jesus.

Instead of a carving Jesus used the image of a plant. John 15:1-4 he says, "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me."

To retrain the body means that some pruning is going to have to take place. That's not always easy or comfortable but it's necessary to this renewal process. This process of renewal is cyclical, which means after you renew your mind and retrain your body you simply repeat the process.

- Repeat the process.

Don't underestimate the power there is in repeated obedience to bring about some major transformation in your life. Eugene Peterson wrote a book on discipleship and called it "A long obedience in the same direction." That's what Paul is saying here. Out with the old, burn it down, throw it out, get rid of it. In with the new, a new mind, a new way of thinking. That new way of think brings about a new way of living, so you retrain your body and actions and attitudes to fit the renewed mind you are continuously developing. The process is repeated over and over again so that you can say what Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

To be able to say that you must engage in this renewal process of the mind and body. This is just the way we work. If you think certain things (mind) you will do certain things (body). As you do those things in light of what you believe it reinforces those thoughts in your mind. This is actually how people get caught up in lies. They believing something that isn't true (mind), and then they act on it (with the body) which makes them believe it even more, which makes them act on it, which makes them believe it even more. You see the cyclical nature of this right.

That also works when it comes to things that are true. If you believe in the truth (mind) you will do good things (body). When you do good things (body) it reinforces those true beliefs (mind). The transformation from old to new happens with the mind and the body. It's not enough though, for me to just say that because that still leaves you with the how question. How do you practically do this renewal process. You are what you think but how do you engage in this transformation of the mind and body?

How do you engage in this transformation of the mind and body?

I'm glad you asked. Even better, Paul gives us several images of what engaging in this process looks like. Here's what he says in Ephesians 4:25-32, "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

Paul walks us through how this transformation of the mind and body should work. Don't do these things, instead do these things. Instead of thinking about lies, tell the truth. Instead of getting angry and giving the devil a foothold, forgive before the sun goes down on your anger. Thieves stop stealing and instead use your hands to earn a living and then be generous with what God give you through that living. Then in the last 2 verses he gives a list of sinful things contrasted with a list of spiritual things just to drive the point home.

Essentially what Paul is saying when it come to engaging in this transformation of the mind and body is that you and I need to identify old habits and replace them with new ones.

- Identify old habits and replace them with new ones.

It's never enough to just stop doing the bad things, we have replace them with good things that will aid in this transformation of the mind and body. You replace the lying with truth. Replace the stealing with working and giving. Replace abusive language with language that is good and helpful. One of the commentaries I read this week on this passage said if you can't build up, shut up. Their words not mine.

You are what you think. This whole thing begins in the mind, and we need to remember and think about whose we are. In verse 30 Paul tells us not to bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit, don't grieve the Spirit. Maybe that should just be our daily prayer. God today help me not to grieve the Spirit you gave me. In whatever I do with my mind and my body today, help me glorify you.

Paul says to combat this grief that we might cause the Holy Spirit to have we need to remember that God has identified us as his own. Other translations put it a little differently; they say remember that you are sealed for the day of redemption. You and I are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We need to always remember that during this renewal process of the mind and body that God is taking us through. As we replace old sinful habits with new spiritually healthy habits.

You are what you think. Think of yourself as sealed, protected, loved, valued, and useful. In this renewal process think of yourself that way, because that is what God thinks of you.