

**God's New Community**  
**Away with the Old, in with the New!**  
**Ephesians chapter 4:17-24**  
**December 5<sup>th</sup> 2021**  
**Preacher – Pastor Roy Summers**

**All the fuss over Adele's "30"**

I don't know if you have picked up the fuss that's surrounded the launching of Adele's new album, called "30", out just in time for Christmas! The English musician doesn't want Spotify to put Shuffle Play on her album. (Shuffle Play is when all the album tracks are played in a random order):  
*"Musicians don't create albums with so much care and thought into our track listing for no reason. Our art tells a story and our stories should be listened to as we intended."* Spotify decided that Adele was far too big a Star to upset, so they removed shuffle play and tweeted "Anything for you!"

Adele had a point! Not only musicians, but also authors write things in a particular order. Here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, there is a purposeful plan:

There's an overall order to the letter: Chapters 1-3—Christian Doctrine, what God has done for us, Chapters 4-6— How God wants us to respond to that great salvation by living a new life

The reason we are to live a certain life (4-6) is because of the Gospel (1-3). But there's order within these last 3 chapters! How can we live out that new Christian lives? Well, says Paul, it all begins by being rooted in the church. When you put your shirt on in the morning, get the first button right, and all the rest will follow. And it's the same in the Christian life: to have the strength and wisdom and encouragement to live for God's glory out there in the world, we must be rooted and connected into the community of God's people. Church first, then rest of life.

But there's another point of order to chapters 4-6. Before Paul spells out how Christians are to live in their homes, their workplaces and neighbourhoods he prepares us for the gigantic changes he is about to announce. Christians, you see, are called to live very differently from the folk who appear in EastEnders, Neighbours, The Archers, Coronation Street, Big Brother, I'm a Celebrity get me out of here, Casualty, Friends, Emmerdale, Brookside or Holby City. The purpose of 4:17-24 is to prepare us for the big contrast between the godless way we used to live and the righteous new lives we are all called to live now. "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", Paul begins, and then he outlines our Old Lives (17-19), describes Our New Lives (20-24) and finally urges us to renew our minds (verse 23).

**(1) Our Old Lives (verses 17-19)**

Let's start with our old lives, the lives we used to lead before we came to Christ, verses 17-19. This is really a summary of Romans chapters 1 and 2, where Paul more fully explains the tragic lostness of the world around us. What happens to all human beings as they grow up?

### ***They harden their hearts...***

It starts in verse 18—"hardening of their hearts" They harden their hearts. They know from the beautiful world around them that God exists. Nature is too beautiful and too complicated and too wonderful to have 'just happened', but instead of acknowledging the existence of a Creator they suppress that knowledge because to admit there was a God would mean asking him how they should live, and they want to live as they please, so they just squash the knowledge of God and harden their hearts against God. They do the same when it comes to right and wrong. It is obvious that stealing and lying and adultery is wrong, their inner consciences tell them that, but instead of following that inner light, they try to snuff it out and harden their hearts against truth.

All this truth denying messes up their minds, says Paul, and their minds become dark and ignorant.

### ***They darken their minds***

"Their understanding is darkened" (verse 18) "ignorance is in them," (verse 19). If a man or woman keeps on abusing their mental faculties by denying what is so obviously true, their whole minds become dark and these people become ignorant. They end up in a fog, not knowing what's right or wrong. What the western world believes today about homosexual behaviour and gender are prime examples of this ignorance and darkness. Truth that is as plain as day is denied!

Our minds used to be like that before the light of the Gospel shone in our hearts . We are not to judge the world for it's ignorance but show compassion upon them! The Lord described the 120,000 lost people who lived in Nineveh as "people who cannot tell their right hand from their left." (Jonah 4:11) - who are in spiritual darkness and the Lord had compassion on them and sent Jonah to tell them to repent. Hardened their hearts lead to darkened minds which in turn drove them further away from God...

### ***They are far from God***

They are "separated from the life of God." (verse 18) Unbelievers are spiritually dead. God has no place in their hearts, no place in their minds and no place in their lives. And this dark spiral has one more downward step:

### ***They give themselves over to impurity***

Read 19, or as one paraphrase puts it: "feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion."

Did you know that in the bible sexual promiscuity is the signature sin of a lost world. The pre-eminent hallmark of human lostness is sexual immorality. That's why People watch Love Island; because, as one report described the show, "These people are engaging in sexual immorality for entertainment."

Someone is asking, is this really how every unbeliever lives? No, just as there is a typical teenager, and a typical toddler, so there is a typical unbeliever, and a typical unbeliever lives an empty and futile life, with a hardened heart, a darkened mind, far from God, pursuing whatever lusts their evil minds and desires chance upon. And that's how we used to live, but Oh how different our new lives

are to be now!

## #2 Our New lives...(verses 20-21)

I have a friend who used to go on holiday with a group of his mates every year. The year after he became a Christian he went with them again— but for the last time! I remember him telling me how uncomfortable he felt on that holiday because everything his friends thought, spoke and wanted to was so different from his new life in Christ! READ 20-21

### ***We are followers of Jesus***

You and I have become followers of Jesus Christ, we learn from him, he's our great example, our teacher, our guide, likeness to him is our goal.

### ***We have taken off our old dirty clothes***

Paul uses this image of getting dressed, taking off our old dirty clothes and putting on new clothes. "You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its sinful desires.." (v22) As one paraphrase puts it, "Everything connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it!" That whole way of life is finished! And instead...

### ***We have put on new righteous clothes***

"you were taught... to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (v. 24)

*What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought*

*Since Jesus came into my heart!*

*I have light in my soul for which long I had sought,*

*Since Jesus came into my heart!*

Is that true of you? Can you and I sing those words? They can be true for anyone in this room, if you will turn from your sins, if you will repent, and if you turn to Jesus Christ, if you believe in him.

When we came to Christ we became followers of Jesus Christ, we put off the dirty old clothes of our past lives, and we put on the righteous clothes created to be like God. How wonderful! But we've got to work at it, persevere in it, continue in this new life because we have three spiritual enemies, our sinful natures, the devil and the world.

"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."

### #3 Our Response: renewing our minds, 23

And the key to living out this new life (as well as being wholeheartedly rooted in the local church) is to daily renew our minds, there it is in verse 23, “be made new in the attitude of your minds.”

Paul puts it like this in Romans 12: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (verse 2) “Get your head in the game!” The key to living out this glorious new life is to be found in a renewed mind, which means new thoughts, new thinking, new opinions, new convictions, new viewpoints, new outlook. This is how you and I are to respond to God’s Word today. There is a negative and a positive.

#### ***First, we must avoid evil thoughts***

You and I have to prayerfully work that one out for ourselves. Perhaps for someone it means not reading certain books, which put unhelpful thoughts into our minds, or avoiding certain websites which put negative or sceptical thoughts into our minds

For someone else it may mean not watching certain TV programs. Apparently some Christians are watching Love island. According to an article on the Christian Premier website,

*“If you are not familiar with Love Island, imagine a debauched version of Big Brother (if you thought that were possible), and you have the general idea.” Half of its three million audience are children or young adults. Teenagers and the so-called “millennials” love this show. “These people are engaging in sexual immorality for your entertainment.”*

How can a Christian remain pure when they fill their minds with such pollution? Paul says “Flee the evil desires of youth” (2 Timothy 2:22)

For someone else, renewing their minds, we’re still on the negative, may require putting accountability software on their phone and tablet and laptop and asking a friend to be their accountability partner.

For someone else, ending a relationship with an unbeliever – or a group of unbelievers - who fills your mind with unhelpful thoughts

You have to work it out! How can you personally run from evil thoughts?

There is a really sad letter in this month’s Evangelicals Now. (If you don’t get a Christian Newspaper I’d really encourage you to subscribe to EN every month, see Nikki who will be happy to sign you up, it’s another way to fill your mind with good things). An anonymous married Christian lady who’s been a Christian for many years—writes in desperation: her Christian husband is addicted to pornography and won’t give it up, though she has confronted him many times. *“The bottom line is—I NEED HELP” she writes. “Why isn’t the lure of pornography talked about in the pulpit? Where are the groups to help someone like me? I’m broken and can’t see a way through.”*

It's a heart-breaking letter! Perhaps, she is hoping her husband will read Decembers' EN and repent of his sin, for pornography is for sure a sin. If a Christian addicted to porn is not married, then pornography is fornication, sex before marriage, and if a Christian addicted to porn is married, pornography is adultery.

What's going wrong with that Christian man? In this area of his life, at least, he's not putting away evil thoughts.

If anyone listening to me, young or older, is struggling with pornography, I urge you to share that battle with a trusted Christian friend and to begin a journey of thought repentance today, don't leave it one week more.

### ***Second, we must fill our minds with good thoughts***

The positive side of renewing our minds is filling them with good thoughts. "Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

How do we do fill our minds with good things?

We spend much time with God's people! We spend much time in God's Word! We might download an App that will share a new Scripture each day. We listen to preaching on Sunday mornings. We read a good Christian book, we share the Word in Home groups, we read God's Word, a little each day, we meditate on God's Word "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)

Since we are close to the New year, I've printed out 30 copies of this 52 week reading plan at the entrance. Why don't you try to read the Bible through next year, or split it into 2 years or three?

The Key to living out this new Christ-like life, in the power of the Holy Spirit is to be found in a renewed mind, constantly putting away evil thoughts, constantly embracing good thoughts.

Brothers and sisters, our new Christian lives are radically different from the ones we once lived, praise God! To persevere in that new life, we need to stay deeply rooted in the church to start off with, and then, with the Lord's help, we need to renew our minds day by day.

May the Lord give us the grace to renew our minds.

*Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;  
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.  
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,  
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.*