



Extreme
MAKEOVER
HEART EDITION
Ephesians 4:20-32

-- Video – You Can Change

Last week, we asked the question, “Are you ready to journey to Christ and lay down your life before Him completely in 2009?” And then in response, we said that, if we are going to be ready, then we must “prepare our hearts for the journey.” We looked at Ezekiel 14:1-6, and saw that one of the greatest roadblocks on the path to meaningful change in our lives—change that brings glory to God—is idolatry of the heart, which we defined as “anything we will sin to get or sin because we do not get.” According to that definition, we investigated our hearts to see what we have desired above Christ and then embarked upon on a search and destroy mission with the target being idolatry of the heart. To do so, we set out to obey the remedy to heart idolatry that God conveys in Ezekiel 14:6, where He commands, “*Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!*”

-- That was the purpose of last week’s green handout.

Real repentance is the first step to real change. While the changes Christ wants to make in our lives certainly result in doing right, they begin by admitting wrong. However, when the Bible talks about repentance, it means much more than being sorry. In fact, it even means more than putting a stop to unholy thinking and behaving, although that is, of course, an extremely important part. Will you please turn with me to Ephesians 4:20-32? As we examine this instruction from the

Apostle Paul, we will discover the big idea of this morning's message, which is this: The process of repentance is made complete by replacement.

-- Read Ephesians 4:17-32

-- Pray

Last week, we talked about idolatry of the heart and pointed out that heart idolatry happens in our hearts whenever we are willing to sin to get something or sin because we don't get it. And in that context, I imagine that every single one of us discovered areas of our lives where we need to make changes. Moreover, I will bet that, in response to the conviction we felt, we probably said things like, "I really need to stop watching so much TV," or "I've *got* to stop being such a jerk to my family." You see, when the Holy Spirit is speaking His truth into our hearts, it is not hard to come up with a long list of things that we need to stop doing, or, as the Bible says, "put off."

And that is basically the way people usually go about making changes in their lives, isn't it? For example, when someone wants to stop smoking, what does he usually say? Well, he usually says something like, "I am going to *quit* smoking." And when we realize that we have been talking about other people behind their backs, we might say something like, "Boy do I need to stop gossiping!" And that is o.k., but it is just not enough, because we see here that the process of making change becomes little more than a list of unholy behaviors that we need to stop doing, or as our passage put it, "put off."

Imagine what would happen if we approached all change that way? That is, what if changing everything in life meant only putting off the bad? What would life be like? Well, for one thing, we would live in perpetual darkness, because changing the light bulb would mean nothing more than removing the dead one. Similarly, changing a baby's diaper would always result in a naked baby bottom.

Have you ever thought about that? That is, have you ever noticed how different our approach to changing our unholy speech and behavior is than our approach to changing almost everything else? I mean, when we set out to change a flat tire, we usually drive off on a new one, even if it is that goofy little donut tire. Or, when we go home to change our clothes for church, we do not usually head out in the same old outfit, and we certainly do not leave wearing only our underwear.

Imagine further that this philosophy of change ruled the production of the show that the sermon title references. Imagine that the *Extreme Makeover: Home*

Edition crew viewed change this way. If you have never seen the show, let me explain it to you briefly. In my opinion it is the best reality show on TV, because on each episode, the producers find a truly needy and very thankful family. Then, they thoroughly demolish their crummy old house, and build them a modern palace. It is a heartwarming show and is generally a demonstration of real kindness.

However, what if the show adopted the theory of change we have been talking about? What if, for them, changing a needy family's meager living condition meant nothing more than blowing up their old house? What kind of show would that be?! Can you see it? The host and the needy family would be hidden together behind that enormous bus, waiting in anxious anticipation for their lives to be changed. Then they would excitedly scream, "Driver, move that bus!" And then... Can you even imagine the pitiful looks on their faces? Can you imagine the scene as, instead of a tour of their new home, the host gives the family a tour of their new pile of rubble and then says, "Well...see ya later!"

That is a completely ridiculous idea, isn't it? However, unfortunately, it is not too far from the way in which you and I often attempt to go about change in our own lives. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, we say to ourselves "Stop it!" and that is about all we do. That is, we often blow up the old house without ever making any plans to rebuild a new and better one, and our striving for change yields only a mound of rubble, piled with broken resolutions and temptations of discouragement.

And the problem here, quite often, is that we fail to remember the biblical truth that repentance is not complete without replacement. This is the very point that Paul is urging us to recognize in our passage for this morning. He is telling us that putting off the bad is not enough. Rather, our hearts require the extreme makeover that only comes when repentance meets replacement, because holiness demands *both* putting off of the old self and putting on the new.

-- Ephesians 4:17-32

First, look with me at verses 17-21, where we read:

"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. 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. 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. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.”

Here, Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, which is comprised mostly of Gentile converts to Christianity. That is, he is writing this letter to people who, before coming to saving faith Christ, knew little or nothing about the God of Israel—a fact which was made obvious by their obviously ungodly behavior.

Just look at how Paul describes the unbelieving Ephesians here. In verse 17, he calls their thinking futile, or as some translations put it, vain. Then, in verse 18, he says that their understanding is dark, their hearts are hard, and their lives are separated from the life of God. And he is just getting started. In verse 19, he describes them as callous, lustful, greedy, and impure. In short, Paul is telling the believers in Ephesus that, now that they have come to Christ, they very badly need to be changed from what they used to be before they trusted in Him.

Notice in verses 20-21, Paul says, *“You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.”* Here, he is telling them that, as Christians, their former way of living is not at all like the new life they have been given and called to in Christ, or, as Paul writes in a different letter, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You know, when you think about it, these Ephesians to whom Paul was originally writing in this letter sound a lot like our world today, don't they? Their thinking was futile and they were darkened in their understanding; so it is with our society. They were callous, lustful, greedy, and impure; so it is with our culture today. If you don't believe me, just tune in to Oprah, simply peruse the religion and spirituality bestsellers at Barnes and Noble, or listen carefully to the unrighteousness that colors the evening news. Watch as community leaders callously pass pro-abortion laws with one hand while passing out contraceptives with the other. Listen as they defame the Creator yet worship His creation.

Moreover, let us examine our own hearts and we will see that we too are in need of greater godliness. Let us meditate upon how incredibly high a price Christ paid for our salvation and then remember the idols of our hearts that were exposed last week. If we will, we will surely see that, as long as we live on this earth, the Holy Spirit will be working within us to bring Christlike change into our lives.

Thus, we are blessed to see in these verses that, not only has God given us the Holy Spirit to empower change within us, but He has also given us guidance through his Word. And, in particular, we find powerful instruction in the remainder of this passage.

First, in verse 22, we see that holy living begins with the putting off of the old self. We won't spend much time here, because this process of putting off the old self was the essence of the message that was preached last week. However, recall that the process of putting off is about repentance, not resolutions. As we mentioned before, while holiness results in doing right, it begins by admitting wrong. It means being so delighted with our Savior that we are broken over our sin.

Next, Paul teaches us in verse 23 that renewing our minds in Scripture is the key step in both putting off the old and in putting on the new. He writes, "*Be made new in the attitude of your minds.*" In this context, he is telling them that change happens when the futile thinking of the Gentiles is replaced and renewed by biblical truth. He teaches the same thing the church in Rome in Romans 12:2, where He commands, "*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.*" Meaningful transformation, then, happens when we stop conforming to the world and start conforming to the instruction of God's Word.

And in this step we witness the transition from old to new, for a renewed mind understands that repentance is not repentance until it is combined with replacement. Thus, in verse 24, Paul writes, "*Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*" While holy living certainly begins with putting off the old self, it culminates in the putting on the new. In other words, God is not only calling us to stop doing what he condemns, but to start doing what He commands. And the more that godliness becomes habitual and ungodliness becomes detestable, the more that we are growing in the likeness of Christ.

Finally, in verses 25-32, Paul illustrates this process of putting off the old and putting on the new. That is, he provides several examples of what it looks like when repentance meets replacement. You know, before I came to understand what was going on in these verses, I used to have a really hard time trying to figure out how they could all possibly fit together. I mean, Paul begins in verse 25 by talking about telling the truth. Then, he switches to a discussion of anger in verse 26,

stealing in verses 27-28, and a whole host of issues related to speech in verses 29-32. These thoughts are bound to seem unrelated until we recognize that they are all given as real-life pictures of what it really means to repent in Christ. It means both stopping and starting. It means putting off and putting on. It means repentance and replacement.

- v. 25 – *Stop* speaking lies and pretensions. *Start* speaking the truth.
- v. 26-27 – A side note: When truth telling starts between believers, anger is bound to follow.
- v. 28 – *Stop* stealing. *Start* giving.
- v. 29-32 – *Stop* using harmful speech. *Start* using your words to bless others.

What is both very interesting and very illuminating here is that, in each of these examples given here by Paul, the holy action or attitude that must be put on is the spiritual opposite of the unholy action or attitude that must be put off. Notice that in verse 25, the liar is not merely commanded to stop lying. Rather, for repentance to become complete, he must deliberately work, by God's grace, to become a truth teller. Thus, it is not enough for him to just stop being intentionally dishonest. Rather, he shows that he is truly growing when he starts being honest even when he doesn't want to.

Similarly, in verse 28, Paul shows us that repentance is made complete in the life of the thief, not just when he stops being greedy, but when he starts to live a life of generosity. Furthermore, verses 29-32 reveal that the person who sins in his speech is truly growing when he is doing his best to be kind, compassionate, and encouraging, habitually using his words for the benefit of others. Change that brings glory to God, then, means not only turning away from sin but turning toward the opposite virtue.

Thus, the selfish must confess their selfishness, renew their minds with Scripture about selfishness, and then labor in the Spirit to become the most self-sacrificing person they know. Similarly, the lazy should confess their slothfulness, meditate upon and memorize Scriptures about diligence, and then start working as hard as possible. Spiritual growth is best measured by habitual godliness.

Please hear this lesson from Scripture today: Sanctification will never happen by merely trying to stop bad behavior. This has a lot to do with why over 60% of released prisoners are arrested again within three years of their release. This has a lot to say about why so many diets fail. This does a lot to explain why so many of

us are so consistently hounded by the same pet sins. To grow in holiness, we must, in every instance, take the extra step and very intentionally start the opposite good.

Do you see the pattern from this morning? It is God's plan for our growth in Christ. It is not easy, but it is clear. As we journey together to Christ in 2009, God is calling us to an extreme makeover of the heart. And as He calls, we can rejoice, because we know that what God calls us to do, He equips us to do. Paul says it best in Philippians 2:12-13, where he writes urges, "*Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*"

And that is the glory of our gracious God. We are not alone in our struggle against sin. We have been redeemed in Christ, and if we are truly His through faith, then the forgiveness we have received can never be stripped away. We are forgiven. We are redeemed. We are already citizens of heaven. We have already passed from death to life through Christ Jesus our Lord!

You see, this process of putting off the old and putting on the new is absolutely *not* what saves us. As the verses that Guy read earlier, Ephesians 2:8-9, make clear, "*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*" We simply cannot and will not ever earn God's favor by being good enough. No, the only means of salvation is by true faith in Christ, for only He can atone for our sins.

However, at the same time—and please pay attention to this—our desire to engage in this process of repentance and replacement is evidence as to whether or not we have really believed at all. Spiritual growth, you see, is proof that we have actually been saved and that we have really received the Holy Spirit. To put it another way, if we have little or no desire to change our thoughts and actions so that we might become more like Christ, then it is very unlikely that we have genuinely received new life in Him. As Romans 8:9 says this of true believers: "*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*"

Therefore, as God's Spirit directs us, let us engage in repentance and replacement for His great honor and praise. And for those among us today who have never truly trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we invite you to come

today. Take this opportunity today to repent of your unbelief in Him who gave His life for you, and embrace the new life He offers today.

-- G.O.S.P.E.L., Pray