

Putting on Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, if you were with us last week, you will hopefully remember that we saw, didn't we, that we have a purpose, right?

We as Christians, as members of Christ's church, we have a job to do because every member of Christ's church is a builder.

That might not be what you think you are day to day, but in Christ's church, that is what you are. Everyone, we saw last week, didn't we, is to be equipped for the work of ministry so that everyone can contribute to the building up of the body of Christ.

I think remembering where we were last week will help us understand this next section of Ephesians, if we kind of keep that image in our minds. If you are a Christian here this morning, you are a builder.

We are all builders. Now imagine, right, you're getting some work done to the house or the flat that the doorbell goes. The workmen have arrived.

[1 : 11] You go and open the door, and in front of you are three people standing there in their pajamas. Right, well, you don't think they do each to their own.

And you think, what on earth are you wearing? Right, that is not the right clothes for the job, is it? That's not going to work. If you are going to go about building, there are certain clothes you should be wearing, and it's not those.

The message of Ephesians 4, 17 through to 5, 2 is basically, I think, dress appropriately for the job you have been given. There are right clothes to wear, and there are wrong clothes to wear. These clothes, of course, are not made of cotton or silk. We do not have physical uniform to put on. No, these clothes are made of attitudes and actions, of thoughts and words.

So let's learn this morning together about the outfit we must put on as builders of Christ's church to be able to carry out our new calling.

[2 : 21] So let's look at our first point this morning, just in verses 17 to 24 there. Take off the old, put on the new. Take off the old, put on the new.

You can't really miss theirs when we're reading through it, can you? The kind of, the negative and then the positive aspects of Paul's words here. There is a putting off and a putting on.

Putting off who you once were outside of Christ, putting on who you now are in Christ. And so Paul begins by taking us into the past, or taking the Ephesians into their past.

Just look at verse 17 there with me. Paul writes, Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer, no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

We're picking up again, aren't we, as we saw last week, that language of walking. Which is so prevalent in Ephesians. The one that speaks of the kind of direction, doesn't it, that we've set our whole lives on.

[3 : 30] That was the path the Ephesians once walked, but they are to, well, repent, right? Turn around. Go along a different path.

Because the direction they were going was a senseless one. They were walking with darkened understanding. They were ignorant of the right way.

Like someone trying to find their way with no map and no light in the middle of the night. And they did so, not because no one had offered them help, but because, end of verse 18, because of the hardness of their hearts.

That is what led to the futility of their minds. We do some of our shopping down at the Asda, Garth D. I'm assuming most of you are familiar with it.

It's enormous, right? It's far too big. Americans would probably think it's a corner shop, but by our standards, it's huge. Now, I'm terrible at looking for things.

[4 : 36] Even if it's in my own house and I have very clear instructions on where to find it. I get a great sense of achievement when I actually find it. It's quite an uncommon thing to happen. But that means every time that I set foot in that Asda, I spend 20 minutes wandering around aimlessly before going home and telling Mary that they didn't have it in stock.

It wasn't there. But quite often, as I'm wandering around looking lost, someone working there will see me for the full time doing the same lap of the same aisle and say, do you need any help? And I should say, shouldn't I? Yes, I'm completely lost. I have no idea what I'm looking for or where to find it. Can you help me? But instead, I say, no.

Right? No, no. I'm fine. I'm just looking around. All right? I know what I'm doing. Because I'm stubborn, right? Stubbornness, I think, is the same idea as hard-heartedness here.

You do know, brothers and sisters, that that is life outside of Christ. That is fairly harmless, isn't it, in Asda? That is catastrophic in life.

[5 : 56] But that is life outside of Jesus. People wandering around aimlessly with no clue where they're going or what they're doing and stubbornly refusing any offer of help.

That, I think, is why Paul reminds the Ephesians of these things here. Because it is so tempting, isn't it, to look at the life of unbelievers and think they somehow have it better.

They live more freely. They have more satisfying lives. They find more fulfillment. Paul says, you do know they're completely lost, right?

Wandering aimlessly in the dark. In fact, Paul says, you do know. You do know because that is the way in which you once walked.

Remember it? Remember life before Jesus? Was it more fulfilling? Was it more satisfying? Was it more free?

[7 : 05] They are blind. They are stubborn. They refuse the help that is offered them. And so they have become callous. Their understanding has become darkened.

What starts in their hearts corrupts the mind. And so they choose to live according to their corrupting minds. Following verse 19. Just their passions. Giving themselves up to sensuality. Greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Sensuality and impurity. We'll unpack actually those phrases I think a bit more in next week's passage.

But we see, don't we, that they are blind in their understanding. And so when they stumble onto something like sensuality and impurity that they think will bring fullness.

They hold on to it only to find themselves in ever deeper darkness. Do not walk in that way. Paul says.

[8 : 03] It is completely futile. It might look briefly tempting. It is empty. And you know that because that's the way in which you once walked.

It is dark. It is dark and full of deceit. So turn away. Turn away from that life and leave it far behind. Do not walk on that path because, verse 20, that is not the way you learned Christ. Christ brings light and life to those who once walked dead in the darkness.

And notice, Paul does not say, does he, that that is not the way you learned about Christ. Rather, he says that is not the way you learned Christ. I think the point being Jesus is not someone you know about.

Jesus is someone you know. He transforms our understanding, not by filling us with a knowledge of him, but by filling us by knowing him.

[9 : 16] And so it is something based in our minds, isn't it? But in the same way that you know your best friend, not because you know many facts about them, but because you just know them.

It is our relationship with Jesus. Not our knowledge of his life that plucks us out of the old life and into the new. And that path is not one, the one in which he once lived, but instead one that brings us, we see at the end of those verses, don't we, to true righteousness and holiness.

Away from sensuality and purity, to righteousness and holiness. That is the new destination. That is the good destination.

Righteous living that is pure and distinct from the ways of the world. So Paul says, take off the old and put on the new. We have been made new.

We've seen that, haven't we, in chapters 1 to 3 of this wonderful letter. But we can still be guilty of putting on our old clothes, can't we? We put on the old self just for a moment.

[10 : 32] Because we think it will bring fullness for a moment, but it never does. It is corrupt through sinful desires. It is good for nothing. The old self is gone, so put it away.

Paul says, the clothes that went with them, the question really that we want to be asking here is not, not what are you wearing, but who are you wearing? We have been saved for a purpose. We have good works prepared for us. We have building to do. We have fullness waiting for us. But if we get up in the morning and put on the old self, rather than enjoying good work, we will grieve ourselves with wicked work.

Rather than building up others, we are going to start pulling others down. We're not going to feel fullness. We're going to feel emptiness. Put off that person, Paul says.

That's not who you are. Those clothes don't fit you anymore. And it's not suitable clothing for your new calling.

[11 : 43] Instead, put on Christ. Put on the new self renewed after his image. In the likeness of God.

Be renewed in your mind and put on Jesus. And I think what kind of comes through in these verses is that putting on Jesus is actually a decision we make up here.

Our heart is what sets the ultimate direction, whether it is hard or soft towards Jesus. But what's in our minds dictates what we will wear. If I'm thinking of going out for a run, I put on shorts and t-shirt. I might not actually go for a run. If you're thinking about going to work, you put on a suit. If you're thinking about getting married, you might be a white dress. If you're thinking about going to bed, you put on pajamas.

Whatever our minds are set on, the clothing will follow. If our minds are renewed in Christ, if our minds are set on him, we will put him on.

[12 : 49] We will put on the new self. If our minds are hearkening back to the old ways in which we once walked. So if you want to put on Christ, learn Christ.

Know him. Know his love through his word. And you will take off the old and put on the new each and every day. But you might well ask at this point, what on earth does that look like?

What are these clothes you're speaking about? Where have we been going for the last 10 minutes? How does that actually help us as builders? Well, do not fear.

Paul is one step ahead of you. Because our second point this morning focuses on how putting on the new self will build up the body of Christ. And what that looks like.

Just look there with me through the next few verses. First of all, before we kind of go through them step by step. Just want to see again the direction this is all going in. There's a lot of imperatives here that we will touch on. But glance down there with me first of all at the reasons Paul gives in here.

[13 : 56] So end of verse 25 there. For we are members of one another. End of verse 28. So that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Middle of verse 29. Only such as is good for building up. As fits the occasion that it might give grace to those who hear. Verse 32. Be kind to one another.

Forgive one another. Remember, start of chapter 5, walk in love like Christ in the way that he gave himself for us, for others, to the body. It's all about putting on the new self, isn't it?

Not just to do what is right, although it will be reason enough in itself. But specifically here in Ephesians, it's about putting on the new self in order to build up others, the whole body of Christ.

So let's just walk through with the rest of our time what the new self should look like. What do these new clothes look like in practice?

[15 : 04] We're going to have to kind of move through these fairly quickly. You'll see on your service sheet those six points left. And be thinking, oh no, don't worry, we're going to get going. But it is worth stopping at each point just so we can get a kind of complete outline, a sketch of everything Paul is saying here.

Even if we then have to go and do some of the filling in ourselves afterwards. So, first of all, build up the body of Christ, Paul says, by speaking the truth in love.

Paul begins there in verse 25, assuming that we will have put away falsehoods. Because that belongs to the old self.

That is being cast off. When we speak in half-truths or untruths, it is never, is it, for the sake of others. When we lie, it is almost invariably for the sake of building ourselves up or tearing others down.

But remember, he says, remember we are members of one another. And so in the body of Christ, in the life of the church, you cannot build yourself up unless you are building others up.

[16:18] And you cannot tear others down without tearing yourself down. Rather, he says, speak the truth. Speak the truth.

We'll see a theme through each of these calls. I think they are very simple in theory. They are much harder in practice. Speak the truth.

How hard is that? Well, maybe just look around the room and ask yourself, have I always spoken? Completely truthfully.

Never falsely. Of everyone else sitting here this morning. Have there been times when I have misrepresented the truth in order to paint myself in a better light?

Or others in a worse light? The answer is yes, by the way. When we do that, we're not only damaging others, we're damaging ourselves because we are one body.

[17:29] So speak the truth. Guard your lips. Watch your words. Paul also says a few verses later, verse 29, Let there be no corrupting talk among you.

So speak only what is true and speak only what is edifying. Right? Sometimes something might be true of someone, but will it build up others for them to know about it?

I think this touches, doesn't it, on the very prevalent issue of gossip. Right? How tempting to share with people what you've heard about someone else.

The question you need to be asking, is sharing that information good for the building up of the body? Sometimes we do need to share things, don't we? So that more people can support a brother or sister in need.

Often, though, things don't need to be said. Am I building up those who are listening to me? Am I building up those who I'm speaking about?

[18:36] Two questions we should be asking every time we find ourselves talking about other members of this church and every church. On this building site, it is our words that do the heavy lifting.

False words will pull people apart. True words, specifically speaking to one another about who we now are in Christ, will draw us near to one another.

Corrupting words will tear people down. Words full of grace. That will build each other up. And I think verse 30 flows from what Paul has said in verse 29.

It says, And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. How might we grieve the Holy Spirit? Well, I take it by doing what he has just told us not to do in verse 29.

Corrupting talk does not just corrode people, it corrodes Christ's body. To speak ill of other Christians is to speak ill of the body that the Holy Spirit is building up.

[19:55] It is saying of the Spirit's work, isn't it? You've messed up over the hair. Look at the state of those bricks. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

We are workers on the site. God is the architect. He is the master builder. If we speak falsely or foolishly about other parts of the building, we're not only speaking disparagingly of them, we're speaking disparagingly of the one who is building this house.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. So let us watch our words and build up the body of Christ by speaking the truth in love.

Secondly, we'll move more quickly from here. Build up the body of Christ by hating sin. Verse 26 and 27. Be angry.

Probably not a command you expected to hear in the Bible. But in the context, it is pretty clear, isn't it, what Paul means. Be angry and do not sin.

[21:02] Be angry at sin. And do not stop being angry at sin. Do not let the sun go down in your anger. The bottom line, isn't it, is if we are not angry at sin, we will accommodate sin.

If sin comes knocking on the door, right, be angry. What are you doing here? Go away.

You are not welcome. If we're not angry, we might open the door a little and say, what exactly is it you want? Well, you can come a step in, but no further. Okay, you can come another step in. And it just keeps going and going and going.

If it is allowed in, sin will rot the church from the inside out. We are called to build up the church. If you see a bit of mold in your house, what do you do?

What should you do? You certainly don't encourage it to grow, do you? You say, good job, mold. Neither do you just leave it be. Because if you leave it be, it will spread, won't it?

[22 : 13] And we see sin in our lives, and in the church, right, look at it as you would if there was wood rot in the roof trusses of your own house. Not only is it not welcome, but if it stays, the building is going to slowly but surely crumble.

So build up the body of Christ by being angry at sin. Do not let it in. And never stop being angry. Thirdly, we build up the body of Christ by working for others.

Verse 28. Paul focuses here particularly on the thief, calling him no longer to steal, but instead labor, doing honest work with his own hands.

And when we maybe think of thief, we probably picture someone kind of stuffing plastic bags full of sweets in the local Tesco. And that's not good, obviously, don't do that. But I think we need to kind of widen our scope a little.

Similar to the question I think we were thinking about last week. When it comes to life amongst God's people, we are to be thinking not, what can I get, but what can I give?

[23 : 30] Right, the thief here in verse 28 of Ephesians is someone who scrounges off everybody else. Who is there not to help other people in the body, but to be helped. Now, there are times when we do need help, of course.

But if we go in with the attitude of wanting to be served rather than to serve, I think that attitude can manifest itself in every moment, right, amongst one another.

Not just in what we are doing for a job, but all the way down, I think, to what we do at the dinner table after Sunday lunch. Are we looking for others to look after us?

Or are we wanting to look after others? Live to serve the church, not be served by the church.

Fourthly, build up the body of Christ by putting away bitterness.

Verse 31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

[24 : 38] We can see the progression there, don't we? If you are embittered with someone, well, you will soon be angry with them. And if you are angry with them, you'll soon start slandering them to others.

You'll paint a picture, won't you, of them to other people in the body in the hope that they will feel the same anger towards them as you do. That is destructive behavior.

That is stuffing dynamite in the foundations of the church. So put it away. I think if you are bitter towards someone, if you resent someone for the way you have treated you, it is up to you to put it away.

If there is sin involved, address the sin with that brother or sister, but do it by speaking the truth in love. By being angry at sin, not angry at your brother or sister in Christ.

So bitterness is to be put away lest we start speaking in a way that tears others down. Rather, and much better, fifthly, we are to build up the body of Christ by putting on kindness.

[26 : 01] Verse 32, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God and Christ forgave you. The Greek actually reads kind of more plainly here, it says, be towards one another, kind, tenderhearted, forgiving.

The point is, isn't it, that the attitudes all hang together as one, and they're all going in one direction, again, towards one another. I have an attitude towards others that thinks well of them, that wants well for them, that wants what is good, and is ready to forgive if they do fail.

Just as God in Christ forgave you, and again, the you is plural, just as God forgave all of us, together, with the same forgiveness, show that forgiveness to others that we have all been shown by God.

Because we've had to kind of race through these so quickly, I kind of feel it's maybe been a bit surface level, so just off the back of these last two points, but let me just kind of send us away with something really practical to go and do.

This afternoon, maybe even right now, just think of someone in the church who you don't always really get along with. Maybe someone with whom your relationship's slightly strained.

[27 : 30] I want you to pray for them every day this week. Pray that they would be built up in their faith, and pray specifically that you would build them up in their faith.

Put off bitterness and put on kindness, tenderness. Maybe don't ask them how you can pray for them, because coming off the back of this, that might be a bit awkward. But let's not, right, and I'm speaking to myself here as well, right, let's not hear these words in this kind of passage and think, yeah, I really do need to change how I'm behaving in some ways, and then walk out the door and

leave it all behind.

That's so easy to do, isn't it? So easy to do. But Paul is calling for us not just to change how we think for half an hour on a Sunday, but to change how we live always to one another and for one another.

Let me just actually say before we go into our last point, I think it is worth saying here, right, if you are new to church or if you're not a Christian, maybe this is your first Sunday, let me say just really clearly to you right now just for a minute, okay, what we have been thinking about this morning is that the way the church is to live towards one another because we have been forgiven in Jesus. but doing these things is not what makes us right with God. My slight fear preaching these kind of passages is always that someone will hear it and think that's what I need to go and do to be saved. [29 : 20] No, this is what we must do to build the church up, but in order to become part of the church, we must only put our faith in Jesus. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, because of what God has done for us, not because of what we have done for God.

But what we're seeing this morning is that now that he has saved us, he has done so for a purpose, to grow together in love as one body.

So finally, and most significantly, build up the body of Christ by being like Jesus. Therefore, Paul writes, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Be like Jesus. Walk in love. My love is what will bind all these things together. love is what will cause us to give ourselves up for others, just as Jesus gave himself up for us.

And that is something that is pleasing to God. That is what it means there as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, something that puts a smile on the face of your Father in heaven.

[31 : 13] when you put on Jesus, when you love like Jesus. Paul has called us to put on a lot this morning, but you can, I think, summarize it all by saying, put on Jesus, who spoke the truth in love, who was angry at sin, who gave his whole life in order to give to others, who was kind and compassionate and forgiving.

If you want to carry out your calling to build up Christ's church, put on Jesus and you will be rightly dressed for the task at hand.

Let us pray together for that as we close. Father, we do thank you and praise you for Jesus, who gave himself up for us, who saved us not because of anything we have done, but out of his love and your love for us.

Lord, we pray that we would have that same love for one another and for you, that we would be ready and eager to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the body, to speak the truth in love, to be angry at sin, to give what we have to others, to be kind and compassionate and forgiving, to put off the old self, that we might build up this body, that it might make known your glory and honor in the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.