

According to a poll released by CIBC, Canadian homeowners will spend an average of \$17,000.00 on renovations in 2015. In markets like Vancouver and Toronto, instead of selling their house and buying their “dream home,” a number of existing home owners are looking to make their existing home a little more dreamy.

One of my favourite T.V. shows at the moment is a reality show entitled, *Fixer Upper*. A husband and wife team, Chip and Joanna Gaines, own Magnolia Homes—a company that transforms tear-down-homes into dream homes; their work is revitalizing homes and neighbourhoods in central Texas.

What makes Chip and Joanna so unique is their ability to see the potential for beauty in something that has been abandoned, is broken-down, and looks beyond rescue. We’ve all seen houses that could use a little remodelling, but when the foundation is cracked, the house is leaning, and rot is in the walls, you no longer need remodelling—you need a major renovation. Chip and Joanna do a masterful job of rescuing homes through renovation; the results are astounding.

We’ve been making our way through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and we recently transitioned from the first half of the letter to the second. In the first three chapters, Paul tells us about God, about His love for the world, about sending Jesus to reconcile the world to God and to one another.

If the first three chapters talk about God’s plan to **rescue** humanity, the second three chapters talk about God’s plan to **renovate** humanity. Ephesians 3:17 tells us that God’s plan is for Jesus to make His home in our hearts—Jesus is the ultimate renovation specialist. When Jesus looks at us, He sees beauty that can be salvaged and

restored. We need Jesus to renovate our mind—our thoughts and attitudes. We need Jesus to renovate our hearts—our desires, our will, our allegiance. As Jesus renovates our mind and heart, our behaviour is also transformed.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Brendan talked about the similarities between renovating a home and renovating a life. He suggested that (1) most renovations take longer than we think; (2) most renovations uncover just how much needs to be renovated; and (3) most renovations go much better with the help of others.

Our text this morning, Ephesians 4:17-32, continues to outline Jesus’ renovating work in our lives—He is at work to align our behaviour to our beliefs. And in our text this morning, Paul talks about transformation in terms of changing clothes. Our new life in Christ calls for an entirely new wardrobe—off with the old, on with the new.

At this time I’d like to invite you to open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:17-32; if you are using a Bible from the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 948.

*“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, and they are full of greed.*

*20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ 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 your 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 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they 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.”*

Our text naturally divides into two main sections, vs. 17-24 and vs. 25-32. I’m going to follow the contours of our text, explaining what Paul says and what it means for us today. Let’s begin by taking a

look at vs. 17-24.

In the original Greek text, vs. 17-24 is composed of two long sentences that describe two paths, two ways to live. Verses 17-19 describe life lived apart from God, and verses 20-24 describe a life lived under Jesus’ direction.

### **1. Life Apart From God (vs. 17-19)**

Throughout the New Testament, sin is described at different times, in different ways:

- breaking relationship with God/humanity
- missing the mark, or, falling short of His perfection
- breaking God’s law
- or, sin as an enslaving force

But in vs. 17-19, Paul describes “sin,” and a life lived apart from God, in terms of futility. From Paul’s perspective, a life lived apart from God is useless, worthless, and without meaning. In fact, Paul uses multiple phrases to express this sentiment: in vs. 17 he talks about sin leading to a “*futility of thinking*,” and in vs. 18 he speaks about a “*darkened understanding*,” an “*ignorance*,” and a “*hardened heart*.”

Put together, one author suggests that Paul is making a case for sin being understood as a “malfunction of the mind.”<sup>1</sup> Committing individual wrongs against God and others are a problem, but the root

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<sup>1</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 230.

problem begins in the mind as we make choices to turn away from God.<sup>2</sup>

Turning away from God leads to a hard heart that is no longer responsive and sensitive to Him. In vs. 19, Paul makes a connection between this loss of sensitivity and giving oneself over to sensuality. Paul is using a classical term that describes a callous growing on one's skin so that they no longer feel pain.<sup>3</sup>

If we want to feel the full weight of Paul's words, all we need to do is make a small revision to vs. 17. *"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as **Canadians** do, in the futility of their thinking."*

The question is, do we agree that the human condition apart from God is as bleak as the Bible portrays? Paul is talking about human depravity and while this concept has been soundly rejected in the West, we see its reality everyday. The prevailing Western mindset continues to espouse the idea that humanity is intrinsically good, and with a little education and effort, human can become better still.

In spite of this Western conviction, most people are forced to admit, in spite of themselves, that something is seriously wrong with humanity. Let me ask: *what have you heard on the news in just the past week?* Corrupt FIFA officials have been caught taking massive bribes so that they would grant the World Cup to Qatar—and right

now in Qatar, people are being literally worked to death in order to built soccer stadiums.

This week I've heard about world-class-athletes who are cheating by taking performance enhancing drugs, and as a result they are winning medals and making millions of dollars. Perhaps you have heard these same reports, or perhaps you've heard more about the trafficking of women and children, or wars taking place in various places throughout the world, or the destruction being caused by greed and narcissism.

If you took this list of vices to the street, you wouldn't find a person who would applaud these vices as praiseworthy and excellent. And one would think that in light of these systemic, ongoing, human failures, that society would begin to question its assumptions about the "goodness" of humanity. Society is quick to blame individuals for these vices, but largely refuses the idea that human heart is bankrupt, broken, and in need of repair.

When God is left out of the picture, when we choose to go our own way, it is only a matter of time before we redefine what is good, right, and just. More often than not, our definitions fall short of God's, and we end up damaging ourselves and one another.

In talking about humanity's bankruptcy, Paul isn't saying that humanity has become worthless, quite the opposite—it's because of

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<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, 230.

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles To The Colossians, To Philemon, And To The Ephesians*, 355-356.

humanity's intrinsic worth that the Father sent the Son. We need God to rescue us, to renovate us, and make us new.

## 2. Life Under Jesus' Direction (vs. 20-24)

If our problem is a darkened mind, what is called for is a renewing of the mind—this is the second path, a life lived under Jesus' direction. In vs. 20-24, Paul introduces two images that I'd like to explore: (a) first, changing our clothes, and (b) second, new creation.

**a) A New Wardrobe For A New You:** In a number of Paul's letters, he talks about our new life in Christ in terms of changing our clothes. The essential idea is that since you have been saved, rescued, and adopted into God's family, you need a brand new wardrobe to match the brand new you.

Now clearly Paul isn't interested in the kind of clothes we wear, he's speaking in metaphorical language. The old clothes represent the old way of living apart from God; the new clothes represent the new way of life, lived under Jesus' direction. And so, we are instructed to **take off** old attitudes, character qualities, and behaviours that no fit who we are becoming. In the same way, we are instructed to **put on** the attitudes, character qualities, and behaviours that we see when we look at Jesus.

Remember, the goal is transformation; Jesus intends to renovate our mind, heart, and behaviour. Already in Ephesians 4:2, Paul has told us that certain character qualities will need to be put on in order to guard unity within the church—humility, gentleness, patience, and love. In vs. 25-32, Paul is going to add to this list, but before he does, he introduces a second image—new creation.

## b) New Creation (being made new in the attitude of our minds):

In vs. 23, Paul speaks about being "*made new in the attitude of your minds*". When translated literally from Greek to English, the verse reads being "*made new in the spirit of your minds*". If we want to be made new, our old patterns of thinking need to be addressed and renewed.

For example, you can't go on thinking you're worthless, and, fully embrace new life in Jesus—this old way of thinking will get in the way of your new way of living. You can't go on thinking that God's love for you is based on how perfect you are, or how well you perform—this old way of thinking will get in the way of your new way of living. Until you know and experience the love of God, until you know and experience His forgiveness, you're not going to get very far.

We are to be made new in the spirit of our minds—the idea is that our mind is made new, and guided, by the Holy Spirit. The "new self" Paul talks about in vs. 24 points us back to Genesis 1:26-27. Originally, humanity was created in God's righteous, holy image, but this image has been damaged because of sin. But because of His great love for us, the Father is at work, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, to renew what was damaged. We are to be made new, like God, putting on His righteousness and holiness.

The old clothes no longer fit our new life—old attitudes, character qualities, and behaviour need to go. And in verses 25-32, Paul describes where Jesus intends to bring change—not surprisingly, the new behaviours we put on will seriously change the way we relate to one another. Let's begin by looking at vs. 25.

### 3. Off With The Old, On With The New (vs. 25-32)

First, we are instructed to **put off falsehood and put on truth**, and Paul's reason for doing so is worth noting. He doesn't say that we are to put off lying because it is wrong—though it most certainly is—we are called to put off lying because of how it affects the rest of the community. *Put off falsehood and speak truthfully because we are all members of one body.* You can't build a community on lies, half-truths, and pretending, and because you can't, Paul says that falsehood has to go. Speaking the truth is key in every community.

Second, we are instructed to **put off the anger that leads to sin**. While there are situations where anger is the appropriate response, this is not Paul's concern here. Instead, Paul wants his listeners to understand that anger is out of step with our new wardrobe.

Human anger, more often than not, is destructive to self and the wider community. Angry people do not think clearly. Angry people do not worship easily. Angry people do not build others up. Angry people rarely forgive and are unable to love well. Angry people do not listen. James 1:19-20 says, *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”*

Paul assumes that we will feel anger, but we are to make sure that anger doesn't burrow its way into our life. Our anger can function like a foot jammed in a doorway—this foothold opens the door just enough to allow access to further destruction. Anger provides an open door for the devil to operate in our life. When we allow anger to go underground in our life, it morphs into bitterness, resentment, and

ultimately, hostility. Such anger has to go; we need to show it the door.

Third, we are instructed to **put off theft and put on generosity**. Taking what belongs to someone else destroys community. But in the same way, labelling something as “mine,” holding on to it tightly, and keeping it from others, does nothing to address the community's needs. Taking from others, and refusing to share with others are the two sides of theft. We need to ask ourselves, *what have I taken that doesn't belong to me?, and, what am I holding on to that others could use?* In Christ, a thief can become a generous benefactor.

Fourth, we are instructed to **put off unwholesome talk and put on words that build up**. The word “unwholesome” covers a wide semantic range, but this word was used in antiquity to describe spoiled fish, rotten fruit, or stones that disintegrate. We know that Paul is talking generally about destructive speech because he goes on to encourage the kind of speech that builds up and benefits the one who listens.

Words have power. Words create, they bless and build, or, they diminish and destroy. Last week I talked about the importance of speaking the truth in love. I want to be honest in saying that in every community where truth is spoken, hurt is unavoidable. Speaking the truth requires saying things that some would rather not hear. But, we would save ourselves and others from a world of pain if, before we spoke, we asked the question—*am I speaking to build up and benefit the one who listens?* If the answer is “no” we would be better to practice the ministry of keeping our mouths shut.

In vs 30, Paul departs from his “putting on” and “putting off” language when he says, “**Do not grieve the Holy Spirit**”. We have been chosen, rescued, forgiven, and adopted into God’s family—we now belong to Him and to one another. As a sign of this belonging, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, and now, Paul invites us to keep in step with Him—to avoid anything that displeases Him.

Vs. 31 goes on to provide a list of hostile behaviours that Grieve the Spirit and destroy relationships—bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. And in vs. 32, Paul suggests one last change of clothing—he instructs us to...

**Put off unforgiveness and put on forgiveness.** The call to forgive others is first and foremost a matter of remembering the forgiveness God has offered us. Our sin and our failures move God to compassion, not to contempt. He doesn’t withhold forgiveness from us. His forgiveness is a past, present, and future reality—we never get beyond our need for God’s forgiveness. The same is true in every community—we never get beyond our need to give and receive forgiveness.

Our refusal to forgive demonstrates that we think of ourselves as those who have “arrived,” those who no longer need mercy. Our refusal to forgive demonstrates that we think ourselves capable to judge and condemn others.

People use the language of forgiving and forgetting, but this idea doesn’t come from the Scriptures. Thinks about it...can an all-knowing and all-seeing God forget what we’ve said and done against Him and others? Of course not! God’s forgiveness isn’t tied to forgetfulness. God forgives and chooses not to hold the past against

us; He lets it go. A song written by Garth Brooks talks about our difficulty with letting things go, he sings: “we bury the hatchet, but leave the handle sticking out.” With the Lord’s help, we can forgive and let go.

**Conclusion:** God’s plan is for Jesus to make His home in our hearts. When Jesus looks at us, He sees beauty that can be salvaged and restored. He intends to renovate our mind—our thoughts and attitudes. He intends to renovate our hearts—our desires, our will, our allegiance. Jesus intends to renovate our behaviour.

Jesus is the One who saves us, and Jesus is the One who makes us holy. Of course we are not passive participants, with the Spirit’s help there are things we need to take off and things we need to put on. This renovation will take the rest of our lives and extend to every corner.

I suspect that some of you have looked at Paul’s list this morning, listened to me, and are now ready to sneak out the back door. You don’t want more rules to live by, and you don’t need another person telling you that your life isn’t up to par.

I want to invite you to think about Paul’s list another way. Wouldn’t you like to be a part of a community that lived like he describes? What would it be like to do life with people who are real and genuine—people who don’t pretend to have life together, people who don’t shade the truth, or try to deceive one another. Instead, they really listen to one another, they love one another enough to tell the truth, even when it hurts, but they do it in a way that you know you are still loved and valued. This is the church as God intends it.

What would it be like to do life with people who weren't ruled by their anger? I'm talking about relationships free from shouting, free from the silent treatment, free from rejection. Wouldn't it be great to be surrounded by people who were committed to speaking what will build you up and bring you blessing? This is the church as God intends it.

And when people blow it, get angry, and do the wrong thing—because we will all make a mess of things some of the time—wouldn't it be refreshing, to be surrounded by people who willingly give and receive forgiveness? This is the life we are being invited to live; this is the church as God intends it.

If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Spirit is saying to you today. Jesus offers to rescue and renovate our lives—embrace His gracious gift.

**Prayer**

**Worship**

**Benediction**