Ephesians, Part Three
Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible, and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

All right, well, we are in the middle of a series on the podcast. We're exploring key themes in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. These were teachings that I did a number of years ago as part of a series guiding our church through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This teaching comes from chapter 4. It's where Paul shifts specifically to focus on the practical outworkings, in day-to-day life, of the grand vision of the Good News about Jesus that he explored in the first half of the letter—chapters 1 through 3—in which this grand vision of Jesus as the redeemer and resurrected king of a new humanity that's made up of every different kind of person, ethnically, socioeconomically, culturally. And it's this super-diverse family that's all come together to give their allegiance to Jesus. The second half of the letter, chapters 4 through 6, he explores what it's actually going to require—the character traits, the life habits, the moral commitment, the relational commitment—that's going to be required to live as this new and different kind of community together.

He opens up this second half of the letter in chapter 4 with this bold claim about these followers of Jesus in the ancient Roman world, living in Ephesus—he calls them "new humans." He just straight-up says they're *new humans*. And he just calls them that, and then calls them to live like that.

This is a classic example of what it means to self-identify as a Christian. It means to adopt a new story about myself, even if I don't always live up to that new story and new identity. Paul wanted these new followers of Jesus to live and become what they really are—about adopting a new identity. And so this is very powerful. There's a lot of stuff I learned in preparing for this teaching, and I hope it's helpful for you. Let's dive into Ephesians chapter 4.

[Musical Break (3:03—3:11)]

Ephesians, chapter 4. Most of the letters in the New Testament have some point where you're kind of reading through the first few chapters, and there's a turning moment—where it turns from talking about the story of Jesus and what he's all about and what he

did to how we're supposed to live in response to that.
And so think of Ephesians like a big door. Think about: if you have a big front door—if you've ever seen—if your neighbor has a big front door, or something. It's this massive door, and the whole, heavy thing just swings on these little hinges. And these hinges are—if you turn to chapter 4 with me—the beginning of chapter 4 is this hinge moment in the book of Ephesians.
So look how he begins chapter 4 right here. He says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, therefore, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling that you have received." So this is Paul the Apostle. He's begun a number of churches. Specifically, there's a number of churches he's writing to that he personally was connected to—to these people coming to faith and forming a church.
He spent the first three chapters, which is really—what is that? It's two pages, two and a quarter pages in my Bible, at least—he spent two and a quarter pages telling the story of the Good News about Jesus, and unpacking its significance, and of his life and his death and his resurrection, of how Jesus is forming a new, multi-ethnic family of people who have placed their faith in him, whose identity is grounded in him. And that's what chapters 1 through 3 are about.
And so now he moves—did you see it? He just swung the door right here, and—on the hinges—and he says, "Therefore, in light of this calling to be a follower of Jesus, to respond to his grace, I urge you to live in a way that's worthy of this calling and of this story that you've been invited into."
And so chapters 4 through 6 are like the back side of the door. And it's not, like, a series of unrelated topics or something. He's really pressing this issue: What does it mean to live out, in day-to-day life and circumstances, the reality of this Gospel that's called us together into a family of people called the church, or the new humanity?
And so this is the part of the letter where Paul is really going to get specific. He's going to leave no stone unturned. He's going to address all these different areas of, just, daily life—life, relationships, and circumstances—and he's just going to rethink it in light of the Good News about Jesus.
He's going to talk about anger. He's going to talk about sex. He's going to talk about marriage and parenting. He's going to talk about money, and what you do with your money. He's going to talk about lying and truth-telling. He's going to talk about kindness. He's talking about your work ethic. I mean, he's going to talk about everything in life. He's thinking about all—every aspect of life in light of what he's explored in chapters 1 through 3.
Now, here's the catch, for some of us. These next three chapters—and, therefore, the next, like, whatever, month-and-a-half leading up until Christmas—are the parts of the letter where Paul—he gets really challenging. He gives these challenging, like, moral challenges, moral directives, moral commands. And some of us, we kind of glaze over this part of the Bible, because it's the "thou shalt" and the "thou shalt not" part. You know?
And it's like, "Oh yeah, Paul." And some of us, we think, "Yeah, that's great. It's really challenging. I love it." Others of us, and many contemporaries in our culture, think this is Paul at his worst in these parts of the letters, because they think of him as like a "helicopter parent"—you know?—who's just, like, hovering as the "moral police" over the

lives of these Christians, and he's just overbearing—just telling them what to do because he likes that kind of thing, you know?

And I'm caricaturing that, but I think many of us can kind of get that feel when we read Paul's letters. It's like, "Dang, I really like that other stuff, but now he's, like, getting in my business and telling me what to do, and I don't like that. I'm going to skip and go read the Gospel of John, or something like that." That's how some of us react.

And so we're going to go right into this section and just get into the nitty-gritty. Here's what's most important. It's easy to read this section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and just think, like, Paul's utmost concern is people's behavior and telling people what to do. And that's not true. That's not true. You might get that idea if you just did a surface reading. But if you pay close attention, like we're going to do, the thing he's *most* concerned about is actually not just people's behavior.

What he's really concerned about is about addressing the core *sources* and *motivations* of our behavior. And Paul has a core conviction, and the moment you see it, it just pops up everywhere in his writings—especially in Ephesians. Paul has a conviction that our behavior—it's just, like, a "surface phenomenon," right? The way that we observe each other behaving and treating each other and talking—that's just the surface.

What generates all that surface activity are deep, deep issues—deep character issues inside of us. And particularly, Paul, as he makes clear, he wants to address our source of identity. Paul believes that the way that we behave is generated and flows out of who you think you are—your identity, the kind of person you think you are, the kind of worth and value that you believe that you have or don't have, your sense of what makes you who you are—your identity. And that's what he's going right after in these chapters.

In light of the Gospel, who are you? And if who you are is changing, then holy cow, your behavior—it's just going to change. It just follows. And so let's have that up as we go into this part of Paul's letter, and you'll just kind of see it. I'm putting the idea out there, and then we'll flesh it out in a million different ways. You guys ready to dive in?

Okay, Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 17. He says, "So I tell you this, and I insist on it in the Lord, that you"—and again, he's writing to these Christians who are living in the region of Ephesus—"that you all must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking."

Now I got us all riled up, and now we're going to stop for a bunch of minutes, here [Tim laughs], and just think about this, so . . . So let's stop here. There's something that you could just read right over and see—because it's so subtle what he's doing here. This is so brilliant, and powerful and profound, what he just did in that sentence right there. Look at it again.

He says, "All right, here we go. We're going to live a life worthy of this calling of the Good News about Jesus. I insist on it. You must no longer live as the Gentiles do." Now, "Gentile"—who used that word in conversation this last week? [Tim laughs] Right? So that's just not really part of our English vocabulary.

What's the meaning of the word? It's an ethnic category, and it just means a "non-Jewish" person. Specifically, it's a word that originated in the Jewish communities to refer to people who are "not us." So there are Jewish people, and then there are non-Jewish people—"Gentiles." It's a way to refer to every ethnic group that is not Jewish. In other words: *most of humanity.*

So, “Don’t live as the Gentiles do.” Now, just stop and think this through. Who’s Paul writing to? Flip the page back to, like, the previous chapter, for example. Look at chapter 3. Look at the first sentence of chapter 3. Look at how he starts chapter 3. He says, “For this reason, I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you *Gentiles*.”
Look back further, one chapter. Look at chapter 2, verse 11. He says, “Therefore remember that you all, you all formerly who are”—what does he say? “Gentiles *by birth*. You’re not Jewish by ethnicity. And I’m writing to you because I’m in prison on account of you Gentiles.”
But then, all of a sudden in chapter 4, he’s like, “Yeah, don’t live like the Gentiles anymore.” You’re like, “What? *I am one*”—[with a grin] you know what I’m saying? It would be like Paul writing a letter to the Americans—all of us living in America—and saying, “Don’t live like the Americans anymore.” And you’re like, [with a grin[] “Well, I do live in America, so what do you—?”
But okay, so that’s this obvious—he’s either, like, mindlessly contradicting himself, which he’s not. Can you see what he’s doing? He’s doing something very, very subtle here. Or maybe it’s not so subtle once it’s pointed out to you. In other words, so Paul would—an Ephesian would say back, like, “Paul, I am a Gentile. What do you mean? Are you talking about the Gentiles, as if there’s somebody other than me?”
And Paul would say, “Exactly. Exactly. So yes, of course, technically you are Gentiles by birth and ethnicity,” but Paul’s saying everything of what chapters 1 through 3 were about is that your identity is no longer—if you’re a Christian, your identity is no longer *primarily* your ethnic, or nationality, background. That’s not *who* you are anymore. Your primary identity is some other category.
And so for Paul, you’re not Jewish, but you’re not a Gentile anymore. You’re something else. And that something else, in just a few sentences, he’s just going to call it “the new humanity.” You’re a part of this new humanity begun with the new human, that is Jesus, who lived and died and was raised for us, and we’ll get into that.
But what he’s doing right, first—right from the first sentences—is he’s challenging their sense of identity. The whole thing is going to be very specific commands about, like, not lying and not getting—moving towards anger, and forgiveness, and not stealing, and having a good work ethic. Like, he’s going to get *really* practical.
But he begins with this. He says, “Your primary identity is not what it used to be. You have a new identity. You are a Christian who just happens to be a Greek or a Roman. You are a Christian who just happens to live in America, but *please* don’t mistake your nationality for who you actually *are*. That’s relative. Who you *are* is a new human in Jesus—you guys with me here?
Now I want to drill down on this just because this is such a foundational piece of how Paul thinks about the Christian life. Certainly, people observing Christians living, or observing religious communities, you know, they think it’s like—we’re like the “moral police,” or we’re all a community that’s all about “behavior change,” and just “do this” and “be good, religious people.”
And Paul would just say, “Wow, that’s just a misunderstanding of everything, on such a fundamental level.” So the whole point of this thing is a change in who we are, and that outflows in a changed and transformed behavior that kind of goes in “fits and starts” as we grow in Christ. That’s how Paul *always* challenges people: to *become* who you

actually are.
Now, just to give us, just, kind of a fresh angle on this, from another person who did something like this, and then we'll come back into Ephesians, chapter 4, here. But this is so worth exploring, and I think wrapping our minds around. As I normally do, I'm going to show you a picture of a stranger and then tell their story—because she has a really amazing story. [Referring to visual] This is a picture of a young woman named Crystal Jones. I've actually never met Crystal Jones. She is alive, so I got that going for this story. Normally I show you pictures of dead people, [Tim laughs] but Crystal's alive. She lives in Atlanta.
And I came across her story in a book that was all about the psychology of behavior change—super interesting. But I was so fascinated by her story. I was just like, "Well, I want to find more about that story." And so I just looked her up online and contacted her. And then we had this great exchange, and she was like, "Feel free to share my story." And so I've shared it in a couple of contexts, and I'm about to share it with all of you.
So Crystal Jones started volunteering with Teach For America. Teach For America—yeah, sorry, I was thinking AmeriCorps. It's very similar to AmeriCorps, but it's called Teach For America, which essentially, it provides volunteer opportunities for young people, whether before, during, or after college—whatever—in their twenties, just to go into lower-income neighborhoods and communities in the U.S. and serve and volunteer. And so she ended up being assigned and going into an under-resourced elementary school in a low-income neighborhood in Atlanta. And so she was assigned over a first grade classroom. And so, like, she didn't have her teaching certificate yet. Like she's just thrown—"baptism by fire," [Tim laughs] you know what I mean?
And so she's got this whole crew of first graders. And in this class, in this school, there was no Kindergarten. And so this is first grade, and this is the first time many of these kids are ever, ever sitting in a classroom. And I just want to read her description of the kids to you, and just [Tim laughs] think about how you would feel if you were responsible for this crew, day one.
She says, "At the beginning of the year, I had two or three students who could recognize Kindergarten sight words"—like "dog" or "ball," I imagine. "I also had some that didn't even know how to hold a pencil, or even a book the right way up. The ones who had never been to school, their behavior just wasn't where it needed to be for them to be in the classroom for that long a period of time. I had students who didn't know their alphabet or their numbers. They were all on different levels, and no one was where they needed to be for the first grade."
What would you do? [Tim laughs] What would you do? And so here's what she did, and this is what really captured me about her story. She thought about the psychology of first graders. How do first graders think about the world? Who do they think they are? And who do they wish they could be? And she observed some kids, she said, playing on the playground, and it struck her. She said, "You know, when, like, the first through third graders are all out there during recess, what do the first graders want to be more than anything else? [Tim laughs] They want to be third graders."
And if you've hung out around little kids, you just, you know this—and it starts very early, actually. So I have a two-year-old son, and I think he gives all the indications of enjoying playing with me. And I enjoy playing with him a lot. We have a great time

together. And so we're around in the yard, whatever, and we're having a good time. The *moment* the neighbor kids come out, like the five-year-olds and the six-year-olds, I'm "yesterday's news"—[Tim laughs] you know what I'm saying?

Like, you just, there's something—it's just this radar for other kids who are slightly older than him, and he's just mesmerized, you know? And if you think about it, that just kind of makes sense. Like he looks at me and I'm, like, an alien to him or something—I don't know what I am. [Tim laughs] I'm, like, way taller than he is, and I speak a different language, most of the time. And he's like, "But like that kid over there, he's like me. He's just faster, and he has a few more words than I do." And so he just gloms onto these five-year-olds.

And so that's what Crystal observed. And so the idea hit her: about how to motivate change in these kids. So from day one, she got the kids in the classroom, and she made this declaration. She said, "I'm Crystal Jones. I'm your teacher this year. And I, before June comes, I am going to turn all of you into third graders—that's what we're going to do here. You're going to become third graders, like it or not."

And they're all like, [with delight] "Mmm." [Tim laughs] And so she said, "Everything we're going to do here—third graders, they can run faster." [Dialogue between teacher and students] *Oh, well, no, they can't. Yeah, well, okay, they can, okay well*. "They can read better." *Well, sure . . .* "They can do math better—but not for long, because I'm going to make you into third graders." And so, obviously, she did all this. She shaped all her curriculum around becoming a third grader, [Tim laughs] and everything around tests and exams and so on.

And so the other thing she did—this is so brilliant. So she instituted this system about how they were to refer to each other in the classroom. And so she began to refer to every student as "scholar," and then by their last name. So nobody called each other by their first names in her classrooms. There's always "Scholar Smith," or "Scholar Johnson," with this. Whenever anybody came in and visited the class, she would introduce the class as her group of "budding third grade scholars."

And then every morning, she would have the students recite the definition of a scholar. And they would all say out loud, "A scholar is someone who lives to learn, and is really good at it." And they would say this every day. And she was, just—this mantra of it. And she just realized, by this time of year—November—she said, "It began to work. It began to work."

Like people were bummed to miss out. Like if someone had a doctor's appointment, they would be really disappointed, [Tim laughs] because, like, "What if I don't become a third grader?" [Tim laughs] You know—"what's going to happen?" And she just said she *had* them. She *had* them. By Halloween, she knew she absolutely had them.

And so here's—this is a really amazing story. So by March, comes spring break, and she did a reading comprehension exam—*six months* into the school year. And every single student passed first-grade reading comprehension. And for some of them, that's, like, great progress. For some of them, they were learning ABC six months ago.

It just struck me—here's what she did: she created a community, an environment, where she had made a decision about them: you all are becoming third graders. That's what you all are doing. She didn't reckon about their past circumstances. She didn't base their identity on their skill level. She made a decision about them: you all are becoming

third graders, right? And we're going to live to learn, and we're going to love it this year. And she created a community where people addressed each other according to their new identity—not, whatever, "poor kid from down the street"—but you're a *scholar*. And you live to learn, and you sit right next to me, and so you're paying attention, because "I'm going to become a third grader, dang it"—you know? And she just created this environment—do you guys see what she did here?

This is—you guys see where I'm going right here—this is *exactly* what Paul is up to in his letters. Paul's core conviction is that fundamental change happens to us when our very sense of who we are is completely revolutionized. Behavior follows our sense of identity. It's what Paul's doing right here, as he says, "I insist on it. Don't live like the Gentiles." What do you mean, I'm not a Gentile? "No, you're not. You're something new. You're something new." And he's going to go on to explain what that something new is. We're going to work through the rest of chapter 4 now, but asking and looking at it through this lens of the classroom, of: you are all new kinds of humans now. You didn't know that—did you know that? You're new humans. If you don't feel like it, you need to remind yourself of it every single day because that's who you really are. Let's watch Paul at work here.

Let's dive back in here, at verse 17. He says, "So I tell you this, I insist on it in the Lord, you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking. They're 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"—or some of your translations have, "having become calloused, they've given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they're full of greed."

So this is Paul's—this is the bleak portrait that Paul paints of who these Christians *are not* anymore. This is his picture of who they are no longer. It's a really bleak portrait. There's lots of connections to chapter 2: Paul's, kind of, diagnosis of—not "kind of"—Paul's diagnosis of the human condition. And Josh Garrels just totally rocked that passage, and that was great—and so go listen to that if you weren't here.

But here's—look at verse 19. I think this is what Paul's getting at, here, with this description. He says—he's describing a state of human beings who've *lost* sensitivity to evil. When he says, like, "futility in thinking," or uses, like, "darken in understanding" or "ignorant." He's not saying that, "Oh, if you're not a Christian, then that means you're stupid, you can't think straight." That's obviously not true. That's not what he's saying. He's talking about moral formation, moral knowledge, moral sensitivity, and—because, in verse 19, he's describing the story of someone who's become morally calloused. And so he's asking us to entertain this description, entertain this idea: how does a person—and he's sitting in prison, so I imagine he has some pretty hardened figures in the cells around him—how does a human being get to a place where something that's clearly morally wrong—or clearly just destructive to their body or to themselves or to other people and so on—how does a person get to a place where they actually are fine with that, and they think it's okay?

And Paul uses this word, of becoming *calloused, calloused*. And I did the . . . try and be like Jars of Clay, whatever—play the guitar in college. That didn't really work out for me. But I did form some calluses. So that was—I just indicted myself by saying "Jars of

Clay," didn't I? Sorry about that, anyway. So—and some of you are like, "Jars of Clay? What does that—?" And whatever, whatever. Anyway—they're wonderful human beings. I actually had a chance to meet those guys last year. They're really great guys, anyway. So I didn't mean to say any of that. [Tim laughs]

So what I want to talk about is calluses on your fingers. So if you play the guitar regularly, you know—if you haven't played for a while, you start playing, it hurts, dude. It hurts really bad [Tim laughs], because you have these sensitive, little, soft nubbies here—right?—these little pads on your fingers. The more that you play—right? Your fingers clearly were not *designed* to do that necessarily because it hurts—it hurts, it hurts. You have got to really get these callused pads going for you, for it not to hurt anymore. That's what he's describing—how does that happen to a person, *morally*? How does that happen? Someone gets to a place where they become so hardened to the well-being of other people or themselves that they make decisions like that? What Paul says: he says it starts in your mind. He says it starts in your thinking, in your mindset. There's some darkening—the "lights turn off"—in your ability to make connections anymore.

And this is part of Paul's greater portrait of human beings who have estranged themselves from God by declaring themselves to be God, and by declaring ourselves to be ultimate judges of right and wrong *for me*. And "I'm not really interested in your input on that, thank you very much." You know? And "I'm just captain of my own ship—here we go." Or "I'm captain of the ship that my little subculture defines for me, and we're finding our own way. What's right for me is right for me—it might be different than what's right for you."

That's his diagnosis, and it says: *it leads to ruin for human beings*. Because slowly—as we begin to redefine good and evil in ways that conveniently excuse my own flaws and failures, right? And create room for that, but highlighting the hypocrisy in everybody else—that's just "conveniently" how the lines of good and evil "happen" to fall. Isn't that convenient for all of us, right? And so that's just what happens to us.

And so switches begin to turn off. Things—we begin to make compromises to our own advantage. We find ourselves down a road of decisions, at a place where we never imagined we'd be three years ago, or something. It's this moral callousness. And we all form these calluses in different ways.

And Paul says: it begins with your thinking. It begins by mistaking yourself for God. And so he goes on and he says—he begins to talk about their new identity. Look at verse 20. He says, "That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ"—or some of your translations have "that"—that is, that description up above—"that's not how you learned Christ, if indeed you heard about him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."

This is a really dense little description here, but actually it's really accurate, I think. Essentially, he's saying: when you hear the story about Jesus—the Good News about his life, death, and resurrection for you. It's this message, and this story, that just—if you haven't really heard it before or been, internalized it before—it's just, it's like this truth that invades your reality.

You have this mindset, this view of the world that you're just fine—"captain of my own ship." And then the Gospel comes along and just says, "Dude, you are so screwed up. [Tim laughs] Like the depths to which you're selfish and compromised and self-focused,

like, you don't even understand." And that's not really, like, "good news" to hear that, you know?

But at the same time, the Gospel just does this "flip" on us. It says at the same time that we are judged, and all this stuff is exposed within us. At the same time, it declares about us this decision of God to *love* us, to absolutely love us and commit himself to us, in spite of our deep flaws and failures and brokenness.

And so he says, "Listen," he says, "you heard this truth about Jesus. You were taught to think through the implications of the Good News about Jesus, and it opened up a completely different way of living. And it's this," he keeps going, he says, "you were taught, with regard to your former way of life, that is your former identity, you were taught three things"—and these are so powerful. Three things here, count them with me, three things.

He says, "First, you were taught to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by deceitful desires." Here's the second thing: "You were taught to be made new in the attitude of your mind." And then the third thing, "You were taught to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." And true to form, Paul's mixing all these different metaphors together at once. And there's so many cool things going on here. Let me just point out two.

So the word—we're going to do a little Greek-geek action here. So let me show you this word, "self." Do you all have the word "self," right there? "Take off your old *self*, put on your new *self*"? Give me nods of affirmation here. Do you have the word "self" *there* in that spot? No, what do you have? If you don't have "self," what do you have? [Interacts with audience] "Man." Okay, we're getting closer. We're getting closer there. [Talks with audience member] What's that? Or "hu-man"? There you go—yeah, exactly. All right. So "man," in twenty-first-century English, means "male human." One hundred years ago, it meant "humanity." Now we just say "humanity," or at least I think we should. Anyway. So when he uses the word "self" there, the word that he's using is the word *anthropos. Anthropos*, which—there's two words that that could be connected to in English. This might be kind of funny. What do you think of when you see *anthropos*? Anthropology. Now which anthropology? Right? So the store that my wife does cartwheels over, or the college curriculum, like, "studying human cultures," and so on? So I think, to really hear what Paul's saying, we need to insert this word "humanity" here. He's talking about "self," because he's talking about "your humanity" as an individual. But the whole "front side of the door" of Ephesians 1 through 3 is about God forming "a new humanity" in Jesus. And so he says, "This is what you were taught. You heard this word of the Good News about Jesus, and it taught you to take off your old identity." And "take off," it's the same—he's just talking about "taking off clothes." It's a word about, literally, like, "disrobing."

So "take off your—just like an old shirt, or like the bad cardigans that aren't cool anymore or something, [Tim laughs] I don't know—so take off that. *Boom,* take it off." And we're thinking, like, "easier said than done, Paul. You know what I mean? Like, what do you mean, 'just take it off?'" This is all wrapped together here.

So you take off this "old humanity," and how does he describe it here? This is so insightful—he says, "You just take off that old humanity that's being corrupted by deceitful desires." This is so insightful. So we're back to Paul's view of *how* humans

behave, and *why* we behave the ways that we do. And so here, he gets through "identity" to kind of another angle here. He talks about "desire."

So humans—we have all these desires, and they're good desires. The desire to be in relationship, the desire to be known and know others, the desire to have sex, the desire to have my basic needs cared for, the desire to be in a community of people that know me—these are good desires. The desire to have meaningful work, and have a job where I might get to feel good about it, and contribute something to my community—these are good desires.

But Paul says: in the old humanity, where we're darkened—where we become the judges of what's right and what's wrong for me—those desires, they'll trick you. They're deceitful. They'll trick you, because those desires will make you think that they are ultimate ends in themselves.

And if I could just achieve that kind of career status, or just have that financial stability, or just be in a relationship with that person, then I'd be worth something. Then my life would have value or meaning. I'd be secure. My life would be okay. And Paul says, "Dude, you're buying into the illusion," right? Those desires, if you could attain them, can never give you what you're looking for—which is identity and meaning and worth.

And so he says, "The old humanity that you took off is, just, in a lifelong pursuit—driven by desires that are constantly tricking you and letting you down." And he says, "Therefore, those deceitful desires," he says, "they're corrupting you, they're ruining you, because you just go from one desire to the next, to the next. It's just an endless trail of breadcrumbs."

And so he says, "Dude, when you heard the Good News about Jesus, you were taught—dude, just take that old humanity off. That's not who you are anymore. And the new you, the 'scholar,' who lives to learn and is good at it, is this right here. It's someone who's being made new in the attitude of your minds," or some of you have "in the spirit of your minds."

And so what Paul—you know, it might surprise us, for some of us. Paul doesn't say, "You're taught to take off that old self, and then say 'the sinner's prayer,' or something like that. He has something much bigger involved, which is about the remaking of your mind. We are all raised or born or enculturated with patterns of thinking about ourselves, ways of thinking about who you are, your identity, how you get by in the world, the worth or the value that your life has—we're all raised with this.

And essentially, what he's saying is that the Gospel enters your life—the story about what Jesus did for you—and it just messes with all of that. In fact, it just reshapes all of it. You need to start from ground zero again, and just rebuild your whole view of yourself, and of the world, and of God, and of other people.

And so it's about this "renewing of your mind." And specifically, again, if we're reading chapters 1 through 3, it's just owning up to the fact that I thought I was perfectly fine getting by in this world, following my desires where they were taking me. And some of us have a bigger trail of wreckage behind us than others. We all have those secrets that we don't want other people to know. We all have the compromises, the ways that we "fudge the rules" or [have] done something for our own self-advantage, because we declared it to be right, and conveniently, kind of, excuse my flaws, my failures.

And so Paul, he just says: if we can come to a place to just own that—just own it, dude.

You're messed up. It's like, it's no secret to anybody else. Just own it. Just own it. And recognize that whatever humanity is going to have going for it has to be from outside ourselves—something other than just my ability to become a good person.

And that's the Good News about Jesus—is God's commitment to screwed up people like us is so permanent, and so motivated by his love and care, that he came among us as Jesus, to live as the kind of human being he calls us to be, but we perpetually fail to be. And on the cross, he absorbs into himself, just, the collective results of our old humanity—right? Just the train wreck of many of our lives and of human history, the guilt and the sin and the pain. He just takes it all on the cross to its bitter end—to death.

But because his love and his grace and his mercy towards people like you and me is so permanent, it's so committed to us, he raised Jesus from the dead, showing that our sin, that our guilt, and even the death itself, that's been created in our world, does not have power over his love and his grace for us.

The resurrection of Jesus means that your sin doesn't get the last word. It means that your old humanity—that you thought is just doing you in, and that is just going to sink your life—that God's power, his resurrection power, through Jesus, to address you in your sin, to love you, to forgive you, and to remake your mind—it's real. It's real.

And we're a community of people who are discovering that, and experiencing that, and trying to understand what it means to live a life worthy of the calling that we've received. Amen? That's this *remaking* of our minds. You don't do that in a day. [Tim laughs] Right? So you begin that journey. Some of us began our journey of following Jesus with a moment, with a prayer, with a moment of conviction and a conversation.

For others of us, it was a very long, long process. But however you get there, Paul's saying this is about a perpetual "renewal of your mind," a new way of thinking. Adopting this new identity, which he refers to in the third thing here. So you've "taken off" your old humanity. You're letting your mind—your patterns of thinking, your sense of identity—be reshaped by the Gospel.

And look at verse 24. He says, "Then you just put on this new humanity. You put it on." And what is that new humanity? It's the version of you that's created to perfectly reflect the image of God. It's the version of you that's meant to be an accurate reflection of God's holiness, and His righteousness, and His goodness, and His character.

And so this is really powerful. I don't know how you're feeling about yourself today. If you are feeling crappy about yourself today, this is exactly what you need to hear. How is it that you just "put on" the new self? And for Paul, this is an act of faith and trust. And it's an act of faith and trust that in Jesus—Jesus has become the version of me that I cannot become for myself, as Josh quoted Karl Barth saying a few weeks ago.

It's the courage to trust that I just [Tim laughs] so perpetually fail to become the kind of person that even I would want to be. I mean, much less God's standard, I fail my own standards most of the time, and so do you. And so the Good News of the new self is that, by faith, I get to put on a version of me that I could only dream of becoming, and that Jesus was on my behalf, and that he's present with me every day to reshape my thinking and help me, and help me go there.

Do you see what Paul's doing here? He's declaring that you all are "becoming third graders" [Tim laughs] by the end of this year. And he's declaring that "you're a scholar and that you live to learn." *You're a new human.* If you're grabbing onto Jesus, what's

true of him is now true of you. You may not feel like it—you might not feel like it for a while. That's why it's faith, right? You're grabbing on.

You just watch—you hang around people who are affirming that identity with you—and you just watch what happens. All of a sudden, patterns of thinking—you remind yourself every single day, whatever your weak spot is. And he's going to go, "We're going to *blitzkrieg* through a number of them, whether it's anger or having integrity, or the way you talk to people, or whatever."

He's like, "Just watch. Just wake up every day for three months and pray these words aloud to yourself, and declare who you are because of what Jesus has done for you. And set your alarm for noontime prayer, get out your Bible again"—you know what I'm saying? Like *get gnarly*, right? Get really intense, and just see if something doesn't happen.

I just might—I will submit to you that something might happen if you actually took this seriously. If you took it seriously, which doesn't mean wait for Jesus to just bonk you on the head and make you a new person, right? You've got to work for—you've got to "take on" and "put off." You have to *do something*. And Jesus partners with us in the reshaping of our character. Isn't this a great passage? I think it's—well, I don't know. Maybe you don't think it's practical yet. It's about to get very practical.

So now he's just going to flesh this out. What does it mean to put on the new humanity? And he's just going to just go through all these different scenarios. And all these scenarios are all about our relationships: what it means to be in community, and that the health of my personal relationships is one of the clearest indicators of whether or not I understand and appropriate my new identity.

So look at verse 25. He says, "Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body." So he addresses this "old humanity" practice of lying and counters it with the "new humanity" practice of truth-telling. And again, just think it through. "Let your minds be made new about"—what's happening when I lie? What am I doing when I lie? I'm projecting a *false* version of myself. Right? I'm projecting a *false* identity.

"Did you really say that about her? I mean, I heard that you said it. Did you say that?" *No, I didn't say that*. Right? What's going on in that moment? It's this inability to own up to a truth about what I've done. And I would much rather have a false view of myself floating out there in front of people, so that people don't actually know who I really am, and that I am apparently, right now, the kind of person who says those kinds of things. It's about a false misrepresentation of who I am. It's about perception-management. I'm lying to excuse, or to cover over, who I really am inside.

And Paul says: "Dude, just tell the truth. I mean, you're members of one body together. We're a community of people that acknowledges that Jesus had to die for us." We're so screwed up—you know what I'm saying? Like, that's about the worst thing you could say about anybody, really. And so what you're doing in that moment is you're presenting this false view of yourself, and it's like, "Yeah, I'm screwed up—but I'm not that screwed up." You're covering over who you really are. And as a community of truth, we expose the old man inside of us, and we put it off. And we have to let the spotlight shine on it.

And he goes on. He talks about another relational circumstance. He says, "In your anger, do not sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry. Don't give the devil

a foothold." So I talked about this a couple of weeks ago. He addresses this thing of relational conflict, which I'm guessing one or two of us in the room have had before with another person. So you have this relational conflict.

And notice, does he say, "Don't get angry, and don't sin?" Is that what he says? That's not what he says. Does the new humanity get angry? Totally. [Tim laughs] Yes, totally. "When you get angry"—if you're living in close community with other people, sharing about your lives, you're going to eventually, at some point, say something or do something and you're going to hurt somebody's feelings, because it's going to happen. So how are you going to do—how are you going to deal with that?

And so Paul says you have a choice in that moment. Because your anger is just energy aroused to protect something—usually yourself—but it's not always bad. Anger might be energy that gets stirred up to protect another person, and that's really good—that's a positive thing. And so the question is, what do you do with this emotional energy in the new humanity?

And Paul says, "You use it to go address the person and the situation and the relationship, and you talk it out. You talk it out, and you work towards forgiveness. Otherwise, evil spiritual powers can begin to create rifts in the community of God's family. That's how we roll as the new humanity. We move towards conflict resolution. That's what we do."

Let's keep going. Verse 28: "Anyone who's been stealing must steal no longer, but needs to get to work doing something useful with their own hands so that they can have something to share with those in need." And so the old humanity that I've taken off puts myself at the center and will do whatever it takes—you know—to satisfy my wants and my needs, right? And so the new humanity is just like, "No, dude. Jesus is at the center. And then right close to him are other people, and that's my, like, mode of living: Jesus, 'love God and love other people.' That's just how we roll here in the new humanity."

And so whatever I need to do, really it's about remaking your mind. Why do I think I want or need that? What is it that wants me to perpetually put myself at the center and just do whatever it takes to get stuff that I say I want or I need? You have to *go* there, and you have to remake your mind, and you have to think it through—which means see a therapist, or something. But you need to go there. You need to remake your mind so that you can put on this new identity.

Let's keep going. He says, "Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, only what's helpful for building others up according to their needs, so that it can give grace to those who are listening. And don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption."

How many of you—up in verse 29, for "unwholesome talk"—how many of you have the word "rot" or "rotten"? Anybody? "Unwholesome"—other translations? The word, literally, is "rotten," like referring to a piece of soggy, mushy, rotten fruit sitting on your counter, right? *Rotten*. So he's saying, "Don't talk in ways that introduce 'rot' into other people's lives."

And I don't think he's—I mean, he might be talking about, like, dirty jokes, or something like that. But what he recommends is the new-humanity practice in its place, is: whatever it is that you say to other people, have it be something so that they walk away feeling like they've been given a gift after being with you, speech that builds them up,

that seeks to encourage them.
And so I think whatever "rotten" speech is, it's speech that introduces "rottenness" into the community of God's people. Like, why would you do that, dude? That's your old humanity creeping in, right? They're like, "Check that. Just check it. That's not how we do it here. This is a community of people that's built around the story of God's grace, that's restoring and forgiving and transforming human beings—why would you do that here? That doesn't make any sense at all. That's not what a 'third grader' does. Scholars don't act like that," right?
Finish it out, verses 31, and then through the first sentences of 5. He says, "Get rid of bitterness and rage, these intense negative emotions that burst out into"—what?—"into anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. That's your old humanity. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgave you."
And it's very—at the end of this, kind of, "barrage" of moral commands—it's very easy to feel like "I'm lame—" whatever. It's really hard. Or you might feel like, "Dang, dude, quit telling me what to do." [Tim laughs] Some of you—like the anti-authoritarians, you know? And so he wraps it around. He does exactly at the end here, what he did at the beginning. Exactly what Crystal did.
Look at the first sentences of chapter 5. He says, "Follow God's example," or "become imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering, and a sacrifice to God." Did you catch the repeated word there? Three times here—three times. What does he repeat three times? Some of you are awake, I know it [Tim laughs].
The word "love"—did you see it there? *Love.* Now, this is a core—this is the basic, core ethic of a community of Jesus. And he doesn't appeal to a principle or some abstract ideal. He appeals to a story. He appeals to the story of the cross: Jesus's life and his death. And he calls that story an "act of love."
And this is a part of the way that the New Testament completely redefines our concept of love. This is one area where our minds need to be made new. It's because in the Bible, in the New Testament, the word "love—" it's the word *agape*. And we think of love, in English, as an emotion. In the Scriptures, *love* refers to an action. It refers to acting for the well-being of another person, regardless of how they respond to me. And Paul says this is the basic, core ethic of the new humanity here. It's *agape*, love.
And so he says, "Listen, walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us." We run every decision, we run every word that I speak. You run every way that you relate to somebody, you run every conflict that you're in, and how you're going to resolve that conflict—you run it all through this story. How do I *love* this person in this circumstance as a part—as an expression—of my identity, of being a new kind, a new kind of human?
And notice he says—how do you, like, what's the core motivation for loving? And he says, "because you yourselves are loved." Look at what he says here: "*You are loved*. So walk in the way of love." He doesn't say, like, "You know, like, *chin up*—pull up your bootstraps, and just love people for goodness sakes." [Tim laughs] No, he's like, "Dude, you are loved. Do you grasp the significance of that?"
And it's not some abstract ideal. Like 2,000 years ago, Jesus did something that was

the ultimate act of love for you. And for the rest of your life, you can point to that and say, “Dude, that was for *me*. That was an act of God seeking my well-being before I even existed, before I ever rejected him, or knew about him in the first place. He’s decided to commit himself to love me through Jesus’s action on the cross.” That’s the *defining story* of this new humanity.

And so it’s this tension that Paul invites us into, and it’s what I want us to reflect on as we move into our time of worship, and the bread and the cup. And some of you, I don’t know where you’re at in your journey of growth and following Jesus. Some of you, who knows? We’re just all over the map. It’s Door of Hope. Trust me, I know this—[Tim laughs] right? We’re just all over the map.

And so you might be feeling horrible about yourself right now, because you’re like, “If you actually follow me around with a camera, you just see old humanity everywhere.” And there might be some of you who are really experiencing growth for the first season of your life, ever. And you’re like, “Dude, the new humanity’s popping out. It surprises me even sometimes.” And that’s really exciting when that does happen.

And, this is not abstract. This has to do with anger and lying, and your work ethic, and the health of your relationships, and what you do with your money—I mean, this is where the old and new humanity are at war in our lives.

And so I do not know how any of the barrage of things that Paul said connects and speaks God’s word to you, and what you need to hear tonight. But I trust that it does, because that’s what the Scriptures do. They mess with us—the Good News messes with us.

And so there’s some of us here tonight, where—you just need to hear a reminder of that word of Good News. If you’ve placed your faith in Jesus, you may not feel like it—you may not have lived like it in the last week—but dude, *you’re a new human* because of what Jesus did for you in his life and his death and his resurrection. You don’t have to live like that anymore. You’re actually living out of sync with your true identity as one who has been loved and forgiven by Jesus.

And there might be some of us who are here tonight, and we wouldn’t self-identify as Christians, or we’re just trying to figure out what that even means in the first place. It’s this very simple, beautiful statement of what Paul’s saying: Would you allow Jesus to become for you what you could never become for yourself? Which first means that you have to acknowledge the mess and the selfishness that’s inside of you, and let that die with him on the cross.

And whatever—a new, healed, self-giving, love-version of you is going to come out the other side. It will simply be an act of his grace and his love at work in your life. Are you willing to turn to Jesus in faith and let Him begin to mess with you and do stuff with you? And I would just encourage you to take that seriously tonight as something you need to think about, and maybe even pray about. So I’m going to close us in prayer and just allow us to do some heart-searching.

[EMSB theme fades in]

Thanks, you guys, for listening. I hope exploring this passage was helpful for you, challenging, that you’re thinking new thoughts and have an opened mind to new ways of thinking about God, and the world, and yourself. We’re going to keep on in the letter to

the Ephesians on the next episode, so we'll see you then. Thanks for listening.

[EMSB theme fades out]