

New Year New Nature

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[0 : 0 0] Well, amen. Would you take the Word of God with me and turn to the book of Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 4. We've been going through this series in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus for several weeks now, and it worked out that we jump right back into our series after a break last Sunday for Christmas Eve, because this Sunday, as New Year's Eve, the theme of the second part of Ephesians chapter 4 really ties in with the theme of the new year and our new nature.

So when we study the book of Ephesians, it's divided into two parts, who we are and how we live. The background of the book, it was written by the Apostle Paul somewhere around the year AD 62.

It was written while he was imprisoned in Rome, but he was very familiar with this church far away in Ephesus because he had been the pastor there for three years, and you can read that account in Acts chapter 19.

The first part of the book is all about who we are in Christ. Chapters 1 through 3, we covered that, our identity in Christ, and now we have launched into the second part, the practical part, the application part, how then do we live for Christ?

So, that's what we're covering today. How do we live for Christ? The theme or the topic for today is New Year, New Nature. New Year, New Nature.

[1 : 1 8] If you're with me, would you go ahead and rise and let's stand together, if you're able to comfortably stand, then let's read Ephesians chapter 4, beginning in verse 17, and we'll read down through verse 24.

I normally read from the Christian Standard Bible today. I really enjoyed reading this particular passage from the New Living Translation, so we're going to be using that today, but you follow along in your Bible.

It should be very similar to what you're hearing. Ephesians 4, 17 through 24. With the Lord's authority, Paul is writing, and he says, I say this with the Lord's authority, live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused.

Their minds are full of darkness. They wander far from the light that God gives, because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.

They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. But that is not what you learned about Christ.

[2 : 2 2] Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God, truly righteous and holy.

Let's pray together. Lord, I thank you for your word. I thank you for the gift of your Son. I thank you for the indwelling of your Spirit.

I thank you for your word that guides us through this life. It's the same yesterday, today, and it will be the same in 2024 and beyond. May you speak to us from it this morning.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thank you for standing. I'd like to talk to you for just a moment, based on what we read here in the second part of Ephesians 4, about the idea of a new nature.

[3 : 28] We're coming into a new year, starting tonight at midnight, which would then make it tomorrow, right? How many of you guys are going to stay up until midnight and ring in the new year? Anybody going to do that?

Hardly anyone. How many of you kids think you're going to stay up, and then at some point you are going to crash? I know. It happens. My kids, every year. I'm going to stay up until midnight.

Sure you are. It's a lot of fun. We love the idea of the new year. We love the hope that it brings, partially because we don't often relish the past.

Sometimes the past holds regrets. Sometimes it's tainted with failures. There are things about the past that make us kind of look forward to something new, and hopefully better.

Greener pastures, so to speak. And so what do we do? We set New Year's what? Resolutions. There it is. Which, historically, have 100% accuracy, right?

[4 : 32] Like, we always fulfill those New Year's resolutions, do we not? Sarcasm is not a good form of humor. I know that. I'm sorry. No, of course we don't.

Very rarely, probably, do New Year's resolutions get fulfilled. Sometimes. Maybe there's occasional times that you really stuck it through with something and did what you resolved to do in the new year.

But as we set these goals and resolutions, undeterred by past failures, they get out. This year, I'm really going to do it. This is the year I'm really going to stick to whatever my resolution is.

Someone challenged me on this over a year ago, and he said, you know, I stopped a long time ago making resolutions.

Now, I set values for my life. Now, I set values for my life. And values then determine what I'm going to do. Now, hear me when I say this.

[5 : 32] I don't think New Year's resolutions are a bad thing. I don't think goal setting is a bad thing. I think it can often be very important and very productive to set goals and resolutions.

However, I do believe that they need to be based on values. I do believe that they need to grow out of the values that you and those you love the most have gotten alone with God and set those values for your life.

And then the goals and the resolutions can grow out of that. They will become clear. They'll become apparent. For example, my friend said, who talked to me about this goals versus values idea, he said, a value that I have is when I'm older, I want to be able to get on the floor and play and wrestle with my grandkids.

That's something that I want to be able to do. And he said, I know that that then is going to drive some of the choices that I make in my younger years. And he's got kids everywhere from elementary to teen years.

He said, I know that there are decisions then and goals that I have to set that will help me fulfill that value because that value is valuable to me.

[6 : 58] It is important. So I'm going to do what it takes to then get to that point in my life. So that helps drive the decisions he makes every day.

That's just one. There are many others. There's values that I'm thinking through right now for myself, for my family. What is important? What is valuable? Oftentimes, our goals do not grow out of values.

Oftentimes, they grow out of expectations. Oftentimes, they grow out of something that we think we should be doing and we haven't really stopped to think why. And so we often don't meet those goals.

But when they grow out of things that are truly important to us, then oftentimes there's a better rate of success in actually achieving those goals.

So, number one, new year, new nature. All right? That's our topic today. New year, new nature. Number one, recognize the harm in godless living.

[8 : 05] Recognize the harm in godless living. This is the practical part of Ephesians. This is the, we understand who we are in Christ.

We understand our identity in Christ. So, now we're on to how do we live for him. Number one, recognize the harm in godless living. Look back at verse 17 in Ephesians 4.

With the Lord's authority, I say this. Live no longer as the Gentiles do. They're hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness. They wander far from the life that God gives. They've closed their minds and hardened their hearts against God.

They've got no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. A face come to your mind when you're thinking through that.

Oftentimes, there are people in their lives, in our lives that we know that fit that bill. It seems like they've got no sense of shame. They're going to chase whatever makes them feel good, whatever they think, whatever they want, they're going to chase that.

[9 : 06] The problem is, sometimes we find ourselves living in that same way. Maybe not to the extreme version of those that would pop into our mind when we think of someone who's just living for themselves completely.

But sometimes, we will fall prey to the self-life. We will fall prey to the, I'm number one, I'm going to get what matters to me.

And that is godless living. That is godlessness. We are a people who claim to love God.

We are a people who claim to put God number one in our life, but oftentimes, in reality, he's far further down the list. So, we must recognize the harm in godless living.

Would you look with me over at Romans chapter one? It elaborates on this idea of godlessness for a little bit. But, excuse me, Romans chapter one, we'll read beginning in verse 18, and then down through verse four of chapter two.

[10 : 18] Romans chapter one. This letter is from Paul to the church in Rome. And we'll pick it up in verse 18. God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

They know the truth about God. Did you catch that? I dare say just about every person in this room knows the church, knows the truth about God. But verse 19 says, they know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities, his eternal power, his divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Yes, they knew God. Verse 21. But they would not worship him as God or even give him thanks. They begin to think up foolish ideas of what God was like.

As a result, their minds claimed, their minds became dark and confused, claiming to be wise, and they instead became utter fools. Instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

[11 : 33] So, God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. Now, jump down, if you would, to verse 1 of chapter 2. You may think that you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad.

Remember, he's writing this to a church in Rome. These are people who know God. These are people who have claimed to be followers of God. He said, you think you can condemn such people like this, and how many of us in this room have condemned others who would fall into this list?

But he said, you are just as bad, and you have no excuse. When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself. For you who judge others do these very same things.

We know that God in his justice will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you could avoid God's judgment when you do the same things?

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

[12 : 53] God's kindness is intended to turn us from our sin. God is not beating us over the head with the Bible.

He's not screaming at us in all of his justified anger, how can you do the things you do? How many times are you going to fail? God does not do that.

He shows us love, he shows us kindness, but all of that is intended to turn us from our sin, not to continue living in it. So it's a new year, and we need to recognize our new nature.

D.A. Carson, a great theologian, wrote this. He said, people do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord.

You get that? That doesn't come naturally to us. We drift toward compromise, and we call it tolerance. We drift toward disobedience, and we call it freedom. We drift toward superstition, and we call it faith.

[14 : 00] We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control, and call it relaxation. We slouch toward prayerlessness, and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism.

We slide toward godlessness, and convince ourselves that we have been liberated. This is the truth about who we are. If we really stare in a mirror, and admit the truth about ourselves, we know that we fall into several of these categories, whether it's laziness, whether it's loss of self-control, whatever it is, we know the truth about ourselves.

Now look over in Galatians 5. Galatians chapter 5. Having you turn around a little bit in the Word of God this morning, and that's okay. Galatians chapter 5.

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians. Galatians. Chapter 5, verse 16. We're doing building box here in the Scripture, and some of these passages build on one another.

Verse 16, we'll read down through verse 25. So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then, you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

[15 : 18] The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. The Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.

These two forces are constantly fighting each other. You got that? Spirit versus self. Spirit versus sinful nature. Spirit versus what we call flesh.

flesh. They're continually fighting each other. So, you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But, when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

Wow, that's liberating. You know those Ten Commandments? You know all the Old Testament law that you read about through all those books in the Old Testament? We are not obligated to obey that if we are led by the Holy Spirit of God.

He replaced all that. The law failed. The law could not succeed in turning us to God. The law just revealed how bad we are.

[16 : 24] So, if you want to do it that way, if you want to follow the law and try to get to God by obeying the law perfectly and never sinning, good luck. Because you won't.

Because you've already failed. Because you were born with a sin nature that could not fulfill God's law. So, the law was never going to get you to God. The law just revealed how bad we are and how desperately in need of God we are.

But the Holy Spirit of God replaces that. The Holy Spirit of God can help you. So, we're reading down through verse 25, verse 19.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear. sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures. Think about this world that we live in.

It hits every one of these things. Verse 20, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling. Think about Hollywood. Think about Washington, D.C.

[17 : 27] Think about your workplace. Think about your own flesh and the battles you have with your own self. Hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, other sins like these.

Let me tell you again, as I have before, anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. But, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives.

Here's the list. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There's no law against these things. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there.

You understand what that means? God says, in order to live the Christ life, instead of the self life, part of repentance, part of repenting and turning and changing your mind from your sin to turning to faith in Jesus is nailing the old self to the cross that Jesus died on.

Jesus paid for all that sin, but you can hold on to it if you want to. You can hold on to it desperately if you want to. Or you can choose to take that sin and nail it to His cross and say, I put it to death.

[19 : 01] Now folks, that is a daily decision because unfortunately we're still wrapped in this fleshly sin nature. We have to deal with it until God transforms us with our heavenly bodies and we get to live in heaven forever with Him.

But, until that day, it is a daily choice to nail my sin nature to the cross of Christ.

Say, God, I put it to death. In another passage, Paul calls it mortify the flesh. Put it to death. Kill that flesh. Nail it to His cross.

So, that's what it means to put on the new nature in the new year. recognize the harm in godless living.

Recognize all those terrible things that our flesh, our sin nature gets us caught up in. Number two, renew your new nature daily.

[20 : 01] Renew your new nature daily. Galatians led us right into that concept. Daily putting to death my flesh and renewing my new nature.

Back in Ephesians 4 in verse 20, that is not what you learned in Christ. What's he talking about? Those who live for lustful pleasure, they have no sense of shame, they eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

He said, that's not what you learned about Christ. Since you haven't, since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

Instead, let the Holy Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. I love that he chose those two words, thoughts and attitudes. Because usually that's where we go wrong.

We go wrong with our thinking and we go wrong with our spirit, our attitude. That's usually what causes the problems. That usually is what leads us into other sins is our thoughts and attitudes.

[21 : 10] That's what drives us. That's what controls us. Our moods. These wild mood swings. God's not in that. He said, the Spirit can renew your thoughts and attitudes every day, but you've got to relinquish control to Him.

You've got to every day let God do that. So, back in Ephesians 4, he says, renew your thoughts and attitudes.

Then verse 24, put on your new nature created to be like God, truly righteous and holy. So, let's call this renew the new.

Renew the new nature. Okay? We have the new nature. If you have repented of your sin, put your faith in Jesus and accepted His payment for your sin on the cross, then you have become His child.

You have that new nature inside you. The Holy Spirit is there to help develop it and bring it out and grow it into the image of Christ more every day. And so, we're going to try to renew the new nature inside of us.

[22 : 17] How do we renew the new? One, remember God. Your God is alive and knowable. It is so easy to slip into this idea that God is far away, God has all kinds of things on His plate, and He doesn't really care about what I'm doing every day.

But God does. He cares more than anything about what you're doing. A former pastor that I had said, God has you as the background on His iPhone, okay? He loves you very much.

You're the center of His world, and somehow He does that for all of us. I don't know how He does that. But He cares. He cares deeply. He loves you. He loves me. And He's alive and knowable. You can know Him.

He wants you to know Him. He already knows you. He created you. He knows you intimately. He knows all your personality quirks. He knows the weird things that you think about that you would never tell anybody else about.

God knows you intimately. He knows you better than you know yourself because we can lie to ourselves. We can deceive ourselves, but we're never going to lie to or deceive God. So God knows you so well, and He wants you to know Him as well.

[23 : 22] So your God is alive and knowable. Ephesians chapter 4 that we just read a moment ago in verse 20, that is not the way you learned Christ.

Do you understand? The idea is we can learn Christ. Like, we can know Him. Not just about Him. Not just facts that fill our head. Not even just theology.

But we can actually know God Himself. I know a lot of things about the Dallas Cowboys. I know a lot of things about the Texas Longhorns.

Hook them, brother. I know a lot of things. We got a big game tomorrow, okay? We got a big game. Y'all need to pray that those Washington Huskies... I'm kidding.

We're getting way off anyway. Don't do that because it'll probably backfire. Okay. I know a lot of things about my favorite sports teams. I can tell you just about every guy who plays on their whole team, whether he plays or not.

[24 : 28] I can tell you their coaches. I can tell you just about everything. I know a lot about them. But guess what? I've never met any of them. I don't know them. I don't actually know those guys.

I love Dak Prescott. I know where he was born. I know, you know, I watched him in college. I know all these things about him. But if Dak Prescott walked in the room, I would know him and he would not know me at all.

He would have no clue. I would just be one of the millions of fans of America's team, brother. But I don't actually know those guys.

How many of us know about God? We've been in church. We've been around him. We know all these facts about God. This Bible trivia, we can get just about every question right. But how intimately and well and personally do you actually know God?

That comes from spending time with him. The difference in God and all those professional athletes is God actually wants me around. Those guys don't want me showing up at their house. Hey, can we hang out?

[25 : 32] Can we talk football for a while? No, they don't want that. But God wants me around. He wants to engage with me. He wants me to spend time with him and learn him.

So, secondly, renew the new. Remember your God has conquered death. Your God is not small. Your God is not inconsequential.

Your God is not weak. Nothing too hard for God. He has conquered death. John 11, man, there's no better passage than to see John 11, the story of Lazarus.

A man named Lazarus was sick. They came and told Jesus about it. He said when he heard about it, he said, Lazarus' sickness will not end in death. It happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this.

Then Jesus shouted, Lazarus, come out! And the dead man came out. Amen. His hands and feet were bound in grave clothes. His face was wrapped in a head cloth. Jesus told them, unwrap him.

[26 : 35] Get those grave clothes off of him. They don't belong on him. He's not dead. Unwrap him. Get those grave clothes off. And let him go. Folks, I don't know what's dead in your life, but Jesus can say, come out.

Jesus can restore life. Jesus can tear off the grave clothes. So often, we wrap ourselves in the clothes of death. What does that mean? We live the life that leads toward death.

Instead of recognizing that God has given us a new nature, he's brought us new life. And now Jesus says, take the grave clothes off. Whatever it is for you, whatever you're struggling with, whatever you're going back to, and you're crawling back into that tomb of death and wrapping yourself in those grave clothes because you just can't seem to shake it.

God says, I'm strong enough to conquer that death. I already put it to death. Get those grave clothes off. I've got such a great life for you. We're a new creation.

It started with conversion. It started with when we converted from ourselves to Jesus. When we converted from death to life.

[27 : 51] When we put our faith in Jesus for the very first time. For all of eternity. You don't have to do it again. You don't have to do it every time you sin. You don't have to renew it every year. That conversion is a one-time happening.

Just like Jesus died once on the cross. You put your faith in him once and you become his child. Your faith may falter.

You might fall. But God's promise never changes. So we are converted. We stand righteous before him. Can you believe that? Knowing all the truth about yourself.

Knowing all your faults and failures. And knowing that still when God looks at you he sees not your righteousness but Jesus' righteousness imputed or placed upon your account.

So God says now I see my son's righteousness when I look at your account. So your account is settled with God. So that's the conversion process.

[28 : 52] Now if you haven't put your faith in him then that's not true for you. But please don't leave this house today without putting your faith in Jesus. You'll have an opportunity in just a moment. It started with conversion and then it goes to transformation.

This is a daily transformation. So in the new year what's important to you? What do you value? What's important to you? That will guide your daily transformation.

That will guide your new nature being true being real being alive for you. Yes we have this new nature that God has given to us but so often we cast it off for the old nature.

God can help with that. If it's important enough to you if you value it then God can help make the new nature renewed every day for you.

Romans 12 talks about this. Don't copy the behavior and the customs of this world but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

[29 : 57] Get that? man it just hasn't worked for me in the past because you got to change the way you think but you can't do it God can change the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you and that's good and pleasing and perfect.

What's the takeaway today? Daily renew my values to reflect my new nature in Christ. I've got to daily revisit what's important to me what's driving my decisions what's driving my goals what's driving my actions daily renew my values so that they will reflect my new nature my new identity in Christ.

You see why Paul started to talk about this in Ephesians 4? Because he just spent Ephesians 3 talking about our new nature in Christ. He talked about who we are our identity this is who you are you got to get that settled first then that will drive your decisions that will drive your values that will drive your actions your thinking who you are so daily renew my values to reflect my new nature in Christ.

Let's pray together would we? Lord Jesus I pray that you would do that for us God that you would not let a man or woman or a teen or a child anyone in this room go an entire day without feeling that Holy Spirit conviction those reminders hey you need me I can help you I can help you change your thinking can help you renew who you are God I pray that you do that for us and I pray that you would do a work in every heart in this room that your spirit would have full liberty and freedom to move through this church God let 2024 be a year of renewal for this church I speak that in the name of Jesus over this congregation that you would have free reign to move in our hearts in our families there's no other name given among heaven whereby we may be saved and there's no other name that has the power to transform in the name of Jesus so God let every teen girl every teen guy be filled with your spirit as they go to school be filled with your spirit as they go through their activities sports and whatever else they're involved in

God let every man every woman as they go to the workplace as they're at home let their speech be overtaken by the holy spirit of God let their thoughts be driven by your holy spirit as parents interact with children as children interact with parents with their siblings with their friends I pray that your holy spirit would guide those conversations God lead us into your perfect will let your new nature dominate obliterate completely wipe out our old nature we'll give you all the glory for it we'll give you all the honor we'll praise you endlessly we trust that your will will be done church if you don't know Jesus as your savior would you lift your hand right now nobody else is looking around if you need to put your faith in

[33 : 47] Jesus for the first time would you lift your hand up thank you you put your hand down church if there's something that you need to surrender to God you just need prayer say God I want to surrender my old nature I want to take on your new nature renew it every day something specific God put on your heart that you just need prayer for would you slip your hand up and I'll pray for you thank you thank you God I pray for every heart in this room pray that you would have your way in our church and our congregation good thank you for