



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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### Say No to The Old Life

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It almost makes you want to stand up and start worshipping again. Oh, I hope you will change whatever plans you need to change to be here this Friday night. We do these nights of worship about five or six times a year, and it would just be good to just all be together for that sole purpose of lifting up the name of our Lord and God. I want to encourage you as we just completed worshipping God through our giving. There is a ministry in the city of Seattle that that we have great regard and respect for. Most of you have heard of the Union Gospel Mission and maybe you've heard of the Union Gospel Mission? Yeah, I think they've been there for like a thousand years or something like that, and they have been faithfully serving our city and the needs of the homeless and all the things related to that. And recently they've been under a lot of attack and a lot of pressure to compromise their convictions regarding human sexuality and all the pressures related to that, and they have chosen to stand firm in their convictions and to remain faithful to God's word. And as a result, a lot of people have pulled out supporting them, even churches have stopped supporting them. And I just want you to know that we sent them a check for fifteen thousand dollars this week to praise God, amen. I want you to be encouraged by that because faithfulness in our stewardship and our giving is a part of our discipleship makes those opportunities happen, and so stay faithful. And we will keep supporting those who remain faithful to God's word.

Well let's open our Bibles to Ephesians Chapter 4. Just as a reminder, a constant reminder where we're holding a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to a church that was in the city of Ephesus. A church that he planted on one of his missionary journeys. The church we know was made up of primarily Gentile converts as opposed to Jewish converts. This church was in a primarily Gentile or Greek city. These converts came to Christ. And they were before Christ brought up a in a very pagan way of life that marked

this city's heritage. And now as Christians there they're feeling like salmon swimming upstream against the current, really struggling to live out their Christian life in a place like that. And the temptations to fall back into the old ways, and the old sins were relentless. For the first 16 verses of chapter four, which we've already covered, Paul taught and teaches us that our unity in the body, our unity together, is one of the foundational anchors for Christians being able to thrive in the face of pagan world views. He says that "hey if we are going to live our Christian life in a way that changes the world, in being salt and light, one of the first things that has to be apparent amongst ourselves, is that we are united on the things that unite us. And we talked a lot about what those things are in Scripture and what they are not. For three Sundays we learned what true biblical unity is and what it isn't.

Now today starting in verse 17, Paul transitions to the second foundational anchor, so to speak, for living out our Christian life in the face of any anti-christ or anti-Christian context. That context for you may be where you work, it may be where you go to school, it possibly is even within your own family. Trying to be a Christian in a context, that is very hostile or anti-Jesus. Now what Paul's going to teach us now is that Christians are God's people. And we must strive not for just fitting in or blending in, but for moral purity. If we're going to thrive in our Christian lives in the context that we find ourselves living, we must strive for purity.

Let's stand now as we read God's word. We'll start in verse 17 you follow along. *"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the gentiles do, in futility of their minds. They are dark and, in their understanding, they're alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They've become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity- that is not the way you learned Christ- assuming that you have heard about him and we're taught in him as the truth is in Jesus to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Father, we bow our heads with deep and abiding conviction, that when we hear your word, we hear you. God when we listen to your word, we listen to you. God our prayer right now is that we wouldn't be merely listeners, but you would give us courage today to be doers. God more than anything we want to live in a way that glorifies all of the perfect goodness, and holiness, and love, and justice that is in you. God, I pray for those who are standing all around us right now with heavy hearts. I pray God that

you would meet them right now in this place, meet them God with comfort, meet them God with hope and peace. God ministered to their souls right now and give them strength to look to you and to wait upon you. We trust you, now have your way in our hearts. God, we ask in Christ name and in the power of your Holy Spirit, amen.

You see what makes Ephesians so relevant, so relevant for us living in 2019 in our present day context is that we can relate to living in a place and a time that is increasingly difficult to live the life that pleases and glorifies the sovereign God of Scripture. We live in a time and place very much like the place of Ephesus that Paul was ministering to. But once again the apostle Paul doesn't say what you might hope he would say in writing a letter to people who are struggling to live the Christian life. He doesn't say God understands how hard it is. So, don't sweat the small stuff. He doesn't say that. He doesn't say just do your best to be a decent person. He doesn't say hey I know I know. But listen the occasional buzz of partying, getting drunk with your buddies after work. It's not that big of a deal. Doesn't matter a whole lot. He doesn't say don't I know adultery is off limits but a little fornication once a while it isn't going to destroy your soul, just don't be so uptight. Nowhere in the tone in the words in the heart in the voice of the Apostle Paul do you ever detect any compromise in the face of how difficult it is to live the Christian life in our world. Notice the book and verses of our passage in verse 17 he says, *"I say and testify in the Lord you must no longer walk as the gentiles do in the futility of their minds"* and then look at the last verse 24, *"but put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"*.

For Paul, what he wants us to get here is that for the follower of Jesus, there is a deliberate renouncing and replacing of our old attitudes and morals with new ones. What Paul wants us to understand is that there must be an ever-increasing distance between the old ways we used to think and live and the new ways that we now are supposed to think and live as God's children. What Paul is giving us here is irrefutable evidence of genuine discipleship. Evidence of a life that is being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. And one of these evidences right here at the beginning that we are saying no to the old life, is that our new thinking is now theologically informed. As followers of Jesus, the way we think about the world and our lives is now based on divine revelation. It's not based on you know press releases or cultural shifts or political pressures. So, our understanding of things, like the origins of the universe, and humanity, and morality, and the meaning of life, is informed by what God has revealed in his written word.

You see the three most fundamental questions in the heart of every human being no exceptions. At the heart of every human being longs for an answer to these three questions. How did we get here? What am I doing here? What's my purpose? And what happens after this? How did all this get here? Why am I here.? And does anything happen next? You see the answer to those three questions absolutely determines how we live. The answers to those three questions that we determine, absolutely speak to who or what we will worship. And the answer to those questions will absolutely determine whether or not you have peace and hope in your life. That's why those three questions are so vitally important to have answers to. In verse 17, Paul says that without God we're left only with our futile thinking and trying to figure out life in this world really does become pointless. If you look at verse 18, he says we deliberately make a choice to wallow in intellectual darkness when we alienate God. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts. And when we alienate God, when we keep God at arm's length, the result is always a confusion and a foolishness that inevitably leads to compromising and sometimes even destructive life choices.

Now what should strike us about this description of the non-Christian way of thinking and living is the emphasis that unbelievers always put on the intellectual. There is a high value for smartness, for brains, for those who can really think deeply and figure out the answers, especially to those three questions if possible. And the Bible's clear, we act, and do as we think. In other words, all of our problems can go back to our minds, and how we formulate the answers to the three most fundamental questions of the human heart. Every problem that we have really originates in the mind of the person who is trying to figure out life without God. Now we would call these so-called intellectually enlightened people we would call them you know philosophers or they're just they're just brilliant they're all around us every day. They're intellectually proud, they're very smart, and believing in their darkened and hardened hearts, they actually do believe that they're smarter than God. And they will boldly proclaim for all of us that all religion is false. The intellectually elites and enlightened, will tell us over and over whether it's the university professor, or whoever it is, they will tell us that all religion is false, filled with pride and godless wisdom, they'll search their minds to the for the answers to life's questions. All the while conveniently ignoring the limitations of their own mortality, as well as the insanity of their own contradictions. And the result has been millennia upon millennia of an ever changing, ever conflicting, fog of circular, futile reasoning.

One prominent figure in the New Age thinking as well as a self-proclaimed spiritual philosopher Deepak Chopra gives us his understanding about the world and life when he says, “There is no holy life. There is no war between good and evil. There is no sin and no redemption. None of these matter to the real you, but they all matter to the false you, the one who believes in the separate self. You have tried to take your separate self with all its loneliness, and anxiety, and pride, to the door of enlightenment, but it will never go through because it is a ghost.” Does that make you feel better? Does that explain everything that's going on in here? Does that give you answers? Notice the circular reasoning, boldly proclaiming there is no holy life, no war, there's no good, there's no evil, there's no sin, no redemption, none of that matters to the real you, but they all matter to the false you they don't exist, but they do exist to the false you, which is your separate self, which he never tells us what that means, what is a separate self? Circular futile reasoning.

Stephen Hawking, name you're familiar with, the famous black hole theorist, I think he passed away just this past year, he said this “my goal is simple; it's a complete understanding of the universe why it is as it is and why it exists at all.” That's a simple goal. I was my new year's resolution, I don't know about yours. I just want to understand that all universe. But notice what he's looking for, he's looking for the answers to the fundamental questions, how do we get here? and what are we doing here? Just different wording. Now we can all rest assured that apparently, before he died, he accomplished his goal because he went on to say this later, he said, “I believe the simplest explanation is there is no God, no one created the universe, and no one directs our fate. This leads me to the profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either.” Did you notice the profound realization? Starting out very self-assured, that there is absolutely no God, no creator, no one that directs our fate, but that probably might kind of sort of mean that maybe, there is but maybe not. And maybe but there is no heaven and no afterlife, I don't think. Now he would have been much more respectable if he would have said, I my made my gold understand the universe and I can't figure it out. See if he would have said that I would have respected it more, because we know the reason you can't you can't explain it all, with is because you can't do it without God in the discussion. Once you proudly and intellectually enlightened declare, no God; no answer.

Now, another philosophical fog and futile reasoning, another source of it comes from not from the intellectually elite, but from the source would be the simple and the gullible in our world. And unlike the intellectually elite, who ignore all of God's revelation and refuse to believe anything, the simple and

the gullible and willing to think for themselves for the most part reject God in this sense, that they boldly declared not that all religions are equally false, but they will boldly declare for us that all religions are equally useful. And they would say to the other intellectually elite you're all wrong, it's not that all religions are all false, they're all good. They all have something to give us. We could find answers from all these different religions, and so they usually desperately regress to believing anything. And instead of searching for truth, they end up searching for a feeling that warms their hearts and once they find it the search is over. Until of course the feeling fades. And then they're futile search for meaning and mortality latches itself on to the new and most popular YouTube video or Twitter post.

Now the queen of all gullible, Oprah Winfrey, she has figured out life for us as well and she says "it all boils down to one thing. It's your relationship to the source, and that relationship to that which we call God, or don't call God, or don't even know - is God. It is all that really matters. When you can claim that and see that the literal vibration of your life will change", and then to emphasize her futility and circular reasoning, she puts in all caps "The Vibration of Your Life Will Change". Thank you, Oprah, for clearing up my life for me. And the gullible and the simple buy that, and read it, and just hope for a feeling that somewhere in that mess, she's right. Confucius was just simple. He said, "the more man meditates upon good thoughts, the better will be his world, and the world at large." Just think it and it will be. And don't you wish someone would have told Hitler that? Is it any wonder the twentieth century American philosopher William James said, "listen there's only one thing a philosopher can be relied upon to do and that is to contradict other philosophers" Finally! Finally, one of them says something true. Okay. And if you've ever taken any philosophy classes in college you know that is absolutely true, because every six months, they changed the textbook because they're always conflicting and contradicting each other. See the simple and the gullible, they have this wonderful ability to ask the right questions and no ability to consider the answers.

I like God's explanation for all this philosophical fog, when he told the prophet Jeremiah, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick who can understand it. So what Paul is doing for us in Ephesians 4 is he's saying, hey don't forget, before we were born again we chose to think just like this some of us actually thought we were smarter than God, others of us just kind of clung to and grasped onto any gullible or simple answer to life's hardest questions, hoping that the feeling and the meaning of life would spring up in our hearts and last. He's saying hey that's the way all of us. We were in some category like that before God saved us. But he's saying for the follower of Jesus we say no to the futility of

trying to figure out the vibrations to life's hardest questions and greatest questions without God. We say no to trying to figure out life without God. That's what he's saying here. Don't do that anymore.

When our baby is helplessly sick, or our business partner rips us off and steals our dream, or when we can't stop drinking even though we know it's killing us, when our spouse refuses to love us, when loneliness overwhelms us, and our fears begin to cripple us, when we can't figure out why there's so much evil in the world, and why there's so much suffering in the world. We no longer turn to the agnostics, who don't know if there's a God. And we no longer turn to the atheists who don't care if there's a God. We turn to God. We turn to God's word. You see all they have is their own reasoning. We have the mind of God, revealed to us in this book. Paul says stop walking and living as though you're depending on the world to give you all the answers anymore, stop that. The wisest man whoever lived said these words, *"the fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge. But fools despise his wisdom and instruction"*. In another place, Paul encourages us he says *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person, by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you then you will, you will find answers to the hardest and greatest questions, which is good and pleasing and perfect."*

Here's what we know whether or not we were honest with ourselves, the rejection of God always produces a crisis in the human heart. Every single person who's ever stiff-armed God in the face, creates a crisis in their own heart. When you eliminate God, you always create a deep meaning and a deep need for meaning. When God's absent, all you're left with is yourself. Why am I here? And without God, there is always a constant striving for something more. Now for some of you listening to me right now, this explains why you're so empty. That nagging right under the surface feeling of, is this all there is? Every day? For some of you right now, what I just said to you what, what Paul is teaching us, it's the answer to why you're so frustrated. You've just held God off far enough to where you're trying to figure it out without him.

Now another evidence that we are actually saying no to the old life is that our new morals are now sexually pure. Our new thinking is now theologically informed, and now our new morals are sexually pure. And for the follower of Jesus there's a deliberate renouncing of worldly immorality and it's being replaced in our lives with godly morality. Look at verse 19 he says, *"they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you*

*learned Christ.*" You see the irrefutable evidence of a life that is alienated from God, is unrepentant ongoing, sexual sin. And Paul says that's not the way we learned Christ. That's not what he taught. You see the expectation for the sinner, saved by grace, is that our sex lives are being brought into the loving, safety, and beauty of God's sovereign will. And what's incredibly insightful right here in Ephesians 4 and, proof of the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the words Paul is writing, is the use of the word greedy in verse 19. Without God, without faith in Jesus, our hearts are calloused, and we were given ourselves up to sensuality and greedy to practice every form of immorality. The life calloused against God is easily recognized by our reckless, selfish, attitude towards sexuality. The unbeliever, holding God off, will always work to diminish the norms of things like unconditional love, and commitment, and self-control, and sacrifice, and monogamy, as these things relate to sex. The unbeliever will always try to diminish those things. They will increasingly become greedy, not just for more sex, but for erasing and blurring the lines and boundaries of definition in gender, of consensually and force, the blurring the lines between love and lust or selfishness and sacrifice or faithfulness and adultery, or fidelity and fornication or, tenderness and abuse.

Callousness to God always leads us to destroy what is good. Paul's teaching that as Christians we are to renounce all of those things and put them in our past, because they're contrary to what Jesus has taught about purity and biblical sexuality. And in Matthew Chapter 19 Jesus taught that God created male and female human beings. In Matthew chapter 19 Jesus taught the sacred institution of a male and a female marrying each other. In Matthew Chapter 19 Jesus taught that God meant for marriage to be a lifelong monogamous bond and commitment. In Matthew chapter 19 Jesus taught that God meant for marriage to be consummated and enjoyed by a one flesh sexual union. And it's within all of these God ordained beautiful boundaries that make sex in marriage, and emotionally, safe, freeing, fulfilling and even spiritually joyful experience. That's why Paul later wrote to the church in Corinth when he said, hey, he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him, so flee sexual immorality. Evidence that we're leaving the old life behind, that we're saying no to the old life, is that our morals are now sexually pure.

The third evidence that we're saying no to the old life is this, our new nature is now ruled by righteousness and holiness. The irrefutable evidence of genuine discipleship is not only a growing hatred for our sin, but it is a growing love for our holiness. It's not just saying no, and I hate that now and this trying to remain in some neutral place. No! What Paul says here is say no, walk away from that but say yes, put off the old and put on the new. Isn't that what he's saying right there and 23, "*be renewed in the*



*spirit of your minds put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.*” Listen he says here right in verse. let's see verse 22, *“the old self belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires”*. We did what we did, because we wanted what we wanted. Our desires were corrupted because our lives were without God. We had no faith in God, no trust in God, and so in our old life without God it was easy for us to lie, to avoid being accountable for our words and actions, it was easy for us to gossip about others to make ourselves look better. It was easy to cheat in order to win or get ahead or to avoid obeying the law. It was easy to use anger and threats to control others. It was easy to use passive aggressiveness to manipulate people to give us what we wanted. It was easy to use flattery and to say what we wanted what we thought people wanted us to say so that we could win their approval. It was easy for us to just spew out profanity and crudeness without any regrets. It was easy because our desires were corrupted by sin. But now old-fashioned boring things like integrity, and honesty, and patience, and gentleness, and loving our spouse, and humility, and keeping our word, and giving our tithe, then giving our employer a full day's work, and paying our employees fairly, and sharing our faith, and going to church, and serving and worshipping God. These are the ever increasing continually forming holy habits of the new heart the one who is being created in the likeness of God through faith in Jesus. Our happiness and joy is now more a consequence of our holiness than it is our sinfulness. That's what Paul is teaching us here.

He wants us to be sure that our purity is not just about tacking on a few good minor Christian adjustments to our life. He wants us to know that purity covers over the totality of our Christian lives. In the thoughts of John Newton, being saved by God's amazing grace means that I am not yet what I ought to be. I'm not yet what I'm going to be, but I am definitely not what I used to be. And that's what Paul is saying. The irrefutable evidence of genuine discipleship is that we are not what we used to be. And we're becoming less and less like that. Paul writes this letter to Christians and he says, I know it's hard to live your Christian life. I know it's hard to be holy. I know it's hard to live in a way that glorifies God in the world, in the work, in the school, in the family you're in. He goes. I know that's hard, but the answer is not the blend in. The answer is not the back off. The answer is not the compromise. The answer is not the water it down so people, don't know and so they'll like us, so that they won't get mad at us. He saying I know that's hard, but you want to know it's harder than that? What's harder than that is trying to live out your Christian life on the tightrope, trying to keep one foot here and one foot here, and thinking somehow, I'll keep them off my back, and I'll keep them off my back. You just got both of them not trusting you and mad at you. Over here you're disobeying God, with one foot over here, you're not far

enough for them. And Paul says the answer is get off the rope. Get off the line and step over all the way. All in, old life gone say, no, and say yes to the new.

What would happen, if all the Christians in America would just do that? I'll tell you what would happen, we would be persecuted, but the testimony in that persecution will be of a holy, loving, powerful just, righteous, good God, because we were willing to die rather than to compromise. Paul says, trust me it's way easier to just step over the line all the way and say no.

Let's pray. Would you just take a deep breath and let's use just a few minutes before we all walk out and go on our way. Let me just ask you your heads bowed, have you entirely and completely said no to the old life? If you're honest like me the answer is no not entirely and completely. We haven't. We're not yet what we're going to be. So, the next question is, what is it in your life, that is still looking way too much like the old life? What do you need to renounce? What do you need to walk completely away from right now? What is God revealing in your heart? Would you be willing to repent of that, would you be willing right now, before you walk out of this room, to renounce it, call that evil, call it wicked, call it sinful, and say God I surrender. I put that off. God give me the courage. Keep me strong. I want to put on holiness and righteousness in its place. Just you and God, right now. Pray that prayer to him.

Father in Heaven, we praise your Holy name, that you are gracious, and patient, and good. We praise your Holy name God, that you did not ignore our sin, but you punished it fully and completely, by allowing your son Jesus Christ to die and suffer on that cross in our place. Not only did you punish it God, but you took away its condemnation and the curse of death, and you have given us forgiveness and eternal life. God, we thank you, thank you for making us righteous in your sight. So, God as we walk from here, we pray that we would be a people who are constantly and continually saying "no" to the old life, God give us grace, and faith, and courage, to keep saying "yes" to your life in the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

Two things. If you find yourself sitting here and you know I'm one of those people, I've kept God off at arm's length or maybe you've rejected him altogether and here you are today, and God says, "don't stay there". If you want to talk to one of these people to just say, what does it mean for me to have a real relationship with God? How does that become personal? What do I need? What's the next step that I need to take? They would love to help you take that step of faith. And if you're just finding yourself in this

room right now struggling with some real time hard stuff, they're also here to just pray with you before you go to reach out to God with you on your behalf and to ask for his strength and whatever it is you need before you go home, I hope you'll let them do that. That's our privilege. And I hope to see a Friday night or night of worship. See you then.