

How a church stays on courses

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[0:00] This is God's word. So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

! They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality. So as to indulge in every kind of impurity and they are full of greed.

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. To be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

[1:07] Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour. For we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. This is God's word. Amen. Let's pray.

[2:14] Almighty God, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. And we praise you that this is the way that you have ordained and decided to speak to us, your people.

And so we just commit this time into your hands as we want to just think about what you want to say to us as a church and as individuals. And so bless us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Kind of connected a little bit to the question, sort of, that I asked the kids about forgetting.

I wonder if, do you ever start doing something and then you go into a room and somehow the thing that you went into the room to do has like completely gone out of your head and you're like, why am I here?

Or I do the thing where I do that, but when I walk into the room and I actually go, I go into autopilot and where I start doing something else because I thought that's why I went into the room, only to realise that I'd forgotten the original reason I went in.

[3:18] Going into autopilot, I just want to, and maybe you do that as well. You know, autopiloting is one of these things that it's where we just follow the kind of the way our brains are thinking about stuff.

And where do we get that phrase from? Well, it's aviation, isn't it? That if the plane is on autopilot, it simply executes the flight path that has already been programmed into the, I don't know what you call it, the plane engine computer.

That's what I'm going to call it. If the coordinates are wrong, the plane will not correct itself and fly in the right direction. What will happen? It will go off course.

Now, the same thing can happen, can't it, in life? That if the wrong coordinates are put in in the way that we live, if it's not set for us to walk in the right way, we will go off course.

And there's lots of things that can cause that to happen. You think of, in our relationships with one another, this whole passage from here on in is really about how the church relates to one another. [4:35] Undoubtedly, when in a church, there is times when there is, and in all relationships, there are times when there's conflict or friction. And when that happens, we are tempted to let autopilot take over.

We are tempted to, you know, the old ways of sorting things out, of sorting problems out between one another. We're tempted to let that take over, but without actually setting the coordinates to start with.

We're not setting where we want the relationship to get to. You know, there's that saying, old habits die hard. This morning, in this passage, we're addressing when that happens, at kind of a spiritual level in the church, when our default autopilot deals with relational conflict in the wrong way.

Last week, you might remember how it told us to speak to one another. Key phrase that the way a church grows to become mature is when the whole church is built up by speaking to one another, speaking the truth in love.

Today is the warning of what happens when we don't live that out. And the warning from Paul is that if we go into autopilot, if we act without thinking, if we go back and deal with relationships in the way that we used to, then it is the short path to the wrong destination, the wrong coordinates.

[6:09] It's the path to the church imploding. Right at the beginning of the chapter, this is the headline verse, and I'll keep coming back to it every week. Paul writes that the church should be, he says they should be eager to be at peace with one another.

He writes that they should live in unity. And he writes, I urge you to live a life worthy of your calling you've received. And this is what he then fleshes out with practicalities of what this looks like.

Living like those, not continuing to live like the people we used to be, but living as new people. So as we dig into God's word today, we want to be aware of what autopilot looks like.

We want to be aware of our old selves, where the habits that die hard are kind of still lingering. As a church, but as individuals too.

And let the Holy Spirit show us how to live as renewed people. The problem then, that we kick off with, the problem is this, that we are tempted to drift back to our old self.

[7:21] We're tempted to drift back to our old self. To go back to autopilot. Paul is reminding the church of those in the world, he's calling them Gentiles here.

People who are not Christians. He's reminding them of how they deal with issues. Conflicts, problems, relationally. How they deal with things and why.

The reason he gives is because, if you look with me, he says they are futile in their thinking. Verse 17. He then goes on and he sort of digs down, drills down into where that kind of futility of thinking comes from.

In verse 18 he says, their hearts aren't right. They have, it is due to the, verse 18, the end of that verse, see with me. It is due to the hardening of their hearts.

And so how they think, how they feel, and how it comes out in how they live, is that they've lost sensitivity.

[8:28] It's like, they live like a callous that has lost feeling in its body. And they can't help but indulge themselves in impurity and greed.

Verse 19, I think verse 19 there. And verse 22, it leads to deceitful desires. You know, what it's really saying is that before somebody becomes a Christian, the Gentiles here, the rest of the world at that time, the rest of Ephesus, they're not actually on autopilot.

Because it's saying that is actually just their flight path. The flight path is locked in place. The coordinates have been set. And they're on the way to, you know, when conflict happens, that relationships will be wrecked.

Why is Paul warning against this? Because this way of living, it represents the habits that die hard. For years, before anyone turns to Jesus, this is the default.

And so when there is pressure in relationships as a Christian, the default is to try and rectify or sort things out by going back to the autopilot.

[9:49] You know, when we take matters into our own hands and deal with them in that old familiar way, because it helps us to feel in control. It's what we're used to. It makes us believe that we're doing something about it.

Notice with me all the ways he goes down. He kind of fleshes it out, what that looks like a bit later on. If you go down with me all the way to down to verse 25, see what he starts to say? It's all about how people are, how we're, the ones that we're connected to, how we speak to others. Verse 25, lies. Verse 26, he talks about anger.

Verse 29, he says, unwholesome talk. He turned over the page. He's saying this is how we used to live. This is the old self.

When we act and speak like that, it comes out of an old nature, an old character. And then verse 31, we have the characters really stripped back.

[10 : 46] Not the actions, but what's coming out of our hearts. When we act like that. Bitterness. Rage.

Anger, brawling, and slander. And he's, just to catch all, if I've missed anything, every form of malice. Given what he said in chapter just before we looked, speaking the truth of love.

Speaking the truth in love. This is the opposite, isn't it? This is the opposite of speaking the truth in love to become a mature church. It is speaking, what's the opposite of truth with love?

It lies with hate. And the church will implode. If we lived like that, relationally, we would be a mess. There would be so much damage that would be left unchecked.

And you see the consequences. It grieves the spirit. It gives the devil a foothold. You think that the evil one would have a field there if we were to drift into that mentality. And this is not abstract or theoretical.

[11 : 49] This has happened in churches. It's not just there as a kind of like, you know, it might happen. You look at church history, there are churches where, instead of living out what it says here, the unwholesome talk, the gossip, the sniping behind one another's backs, not bringing things into the light, dealing with conflict, with slander and bitterness.

And the church implodes. The secular world would encourage this. You know, you tell somebody you're mad, you've got every right to be mad.

I wouldn't be speaking to them any longer. Keep your distance, your best, your best, your best, your best, well, away. Outright hostility is kind of promoted. Or there's the alternative, being civil, yet cold and seething underneath.

Passive aggression, backstabbing and gossip becomes the order of play. The world thrives on it. But the church is destroyed by it. It's not the way we were called to walk as believers.

I'm going to move to our principle of the passage. Really, the main thing, the everlasting kind of truth, is that our true self was created after the likeness of God.

[13 : 16] Paul writes that walking this way is futile, that there's nothing good that can come from it. Walking like this is really, it goes back to, it's against actually how we're made.

It's living against the way we were made by putting ourselves at the centre. Instead of living in a holy, kind of life-giving community, it'd be moving away from one another and away from God.

The principle that really underpins life together comes right back to actually, you know, you think, it goes back to humanity, what people were created for. You look with me right at the end of verse 24, we get a hint.

It sounds remarkably like parts of Genesis. See what he says? He says, verse 24, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

That's what he says. We read that the new self were to be created, to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. It is reminiscent of the original intention of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

[14 : 26] They were set apart wholly. They were without sin. They lived with God. Even indeed the language of walking is what God's people did.

They were made to walk. God walked with them in the garden, with him as righteous and holy in his sight. That's the original autopilot setting. It's the original autopilot setting where the coordinates that were set by God were perfect.

It's massive implications thinking that it goes all the way back because the hard-hearted, ignorant way, the futile, preferring greed and indulging in sinful desire, it's not what was intended for any of us.

So when it feels off, when we look at our world and the relationships and it doesn't feel right, it shouldn't feel right. It should jar with us.

Even with our own relationships, or even if we know people who have broken relationships, we weren't created to treat one another like this. Putting off our old self and putting on the new one is really a return to what we were created for, which is why it feels right to live like that.

[15:51] So what brings us to the gospel? The gospel is this, that our old self was buried with Jesus and we've been given a new self. Our old self was buried with Jesus and we've been given a new self.

The old man is in Adam. The gospel is the means by how we return to live out our intended purpose. The word actually for self in this passage is actually the word for man.

It's the word anthropos, where we get the word for anthropology, anthropos, the study of man. So more literally, verse 22, look with me again.

It says, what does it say? It says, you were taught with regard to your former way of life, more literally, to put off your old man, which brings corruption. When we use self instead of man, it's a helpful way of thinking with the way language works, but when we put man back in, you see, the old man is not just referring to our self, there is an echo here of something much deeper.

The old man is referring to Adam. When Adam fell, when he sinned, that sinful nature, the old man, the old self, has been passed down ever since through all humanity.

[17:06] It's a little bit like spiritual genetics. You know, the sinful self has been passed, Adam sinned, and then has been passed down all the way to us.

And in that sense, every person by default kind of has this relationship with Adam, the old man. At the cross, you receive new spiritual genetics.

The old man, the relationship with Adam, was cut off and you received spiritual genetics from the new man, from being in a relationship, a spiritual one with Jesus Christ.

Your old man was buried with Jesus and so was everything that went with it. Jesus was treated on the cross as if he was the old man.

He was treated as if he was the one who'd sinned in the garden and treated as the one who'd committed every other sin that has happened. He died in the darkness.

[18:19] He was separated from his father and he was given over and treated as if he was impure, as if he was greedy, as if he was ignorant.

All those things that come in the first few verses. All the ways that we've lived in our former way of life, Jesus was treated as if he were the one who'd lived that way yet he never did.

So that verse 32 is true. Christ, in Christ, God forgave you at the cross. In exchange, there was a trade, in exchange, we received what was rightly due to Jesus himself.

Instead of a darkened understanding, we received an enlightened one. Instead of separation from God, we're connected to him forever. Instead of a hard heart, a soft one, a new self is recreated in true righteousness and holiness as was intended for all humanity in the garden.

Verse 20. Paul uses this striking phrase. It's quite a, it sounds a little bit odd. It says, that however is not the way of life you learned.

[19:51] Another way that he puts it is the way that you have learned Christ. Verse 21, you heard about him and were taught about him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

But that is a distinctive term of phrase because it means that Christ is a person that you learn. Which means you don't merely learn facts or information about Jesus.

But when you come to him, past tense, you learn him. you receive him and you learn him. When we receive the new self, the new man, when we put on Jesus, we're so connected to him that his life becomes the way that we now live to the point where we can see we have learned how to live as redeemed people.

We receive not information but we receive a living person. which brings us to our response. Now, as redeemed people, we get to put off our old self, our old man and put on the new one.

In light of the cross, it means that we don't have to return to that former way of life. As people who've been given a new self, the self of Jesus, we can live as righteous and holiness.

[21:06] It means all those things that it kind of commands us to do. You know, you read that and you think, well, man alive, I've like fallen at most of those.

I've like slandered, I got angry, I felt bitter before, I've definitely owned wholesome talks come out of my mouth. You know, all of those things, I haven't spoke truthfully and there's times when I've just gone to bed angry.

I've done all of those. So, how does this, what does this new man, old man, how do I do it? Because we've been given the self of Jesus.

We've been given the new man and now we're called to walk as the redeemed people that we have been made to be. You are new, now walk as someone who is new.

Verse 25 to 31, we can go through them again, rather than lies, we can speak truthfully. Instead of staying angry, we can reconcile. Rather than stealing, we can work and share with the needy.

[22 : 17] Rather, speaking to tear people down, we can build them up and we can get rid of all the bitterness and rage and things that come into our mind and respond with kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

forgiveness. We can treat people like Jesus would treat them because he treated us that way. And we become an instrument empowered by the spirit of Jesus to work in other people's lives in the church.

We don't have to, sort of, the strength to live like that doesn't come from ourselves, it comes because we have received Jesus.

And, you know, this is ordinary life that it's talking about. This is not the kind of big flash dash moments in life, but it's the everyday faithfulness in everyday normal relationships that we have with one another.

Last week, I mentioned, I've come back to it a few times, the vision for the church where God uses each of us to grow in maturity by speaking the truth in love. The reality day by day, week to week, is that all of us have, and I've mentioned it, we have this kind of desire that's still there to go back to the former way, and we will still get on each other's nerves, sometimes in small ways and sometimes in big ways.

[23 : 46] The stress of that can cause us to go back to our former ways, cope and react with how we used to, old habits die hard, and go on autopilot, but with the new life given to us, we get to be the hands, the feet, and the voice of Jesus in each other's lives.

When there is conflict, we see Jesus' forgiveness of us. We remember his compassion and kindness, and we can show it to one another.

When the world says you've got every right to be mad, we get to say, I do, but Jesus isn't mad at me. When the world says I wouldn't be speaking to them any longer, keep your distance, you're best staying well away, we get to say, yeah, but Jesus has drawn me close and speaks to me, so I'll move towards them.

We get to put off the old self, the old man, Adam, and put on the new self, put on Jesus. It's the fruit of the spirit, verse 30, who has sealed us for the day of redemption.

And we don't grieve, actually, who we don't grieve, but who rejoices when we restore the relationships because Jesus has restored his relationship with us. Going back onto autopilot and reverting back to the old way, we will all face, but the solution is even better than we could have imagined.

[25 : 17] We don't have to try and take hold of the plane ourselves. Jesus is the one in the cockpit of our lives. The cross doesn't just pay for our sin to bring us to new life, it does do that, but it also pays for all the times that we drift back.

It also pays for all the past sins, but it pays for all the present ones and all the future ones too, and all the sinning will do before we're made perfect. And so there is a great invitation today from the word of God to put off the old self and to put on the new, put off the ways of sin and put on Christ. You have learned him, you have heard about him and have been taught by him. You have learned his way to do relationships, you can hand over the controls of the cockpit and let him be in control. And if you're here today and you're still thinking about what it means to follow Jesus, you're not quite there and maybe there's things that you're still sat on the fence about really putting your trust in him.

There is something about what we read about this way of relationships that it speaks to all of us because we would love all our relationships to go like this. these are the coordinates that we want for relating to one another.

[26 : 46] It is weary dealing with people when it brings sleepless nights and anxiety and malice and bitterness and gossip and slander. If you're still thinking about it, you don't have to live that way anymore.

One of the best things, you call it apologetics, like a defence of the faith, of why Christianity is you can see that it's true, you have to believe the things that it says it's true as kind of indicative statements, but one of the best things is the proof of what the Spirit of God does in people's lives is the evidence that it's real.

So when you see Christians acting like this one another in a way that the world does not act, it is the evidence that the Spirit of God is there.

It's the best defence. How do you know Christianity is true? Well look how Christians treat one another, in the main. You can have that, if you're thinking it through, you can have that way, you can have the old self gone, forgiveness, and you can be given the life of Jesus to live, and you can walk in his ways, you can put that on today for the first time, and let Jesus set the coordinates of your life.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we want to be a church like this.

[28 : 28] We want to walk as people that, in a way that we are worthy of the calling to which we've received.

We want to be a church that grows in maturity, that speaks the truth in love. we know that we will be tempted to drift back to the old man, our former way of life, each of us.

But I pray that you, we just want to hand over the direction of the church into your hands. I thank you and I praise you that it is not left to us that we can let you set the coordinates of our own individual lives and of the church.

And so we give it to you today and we pray that you would mould and fashion our church to be one that is kind and compassionate, that forgives one another, where we, as we live, are a witness of the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so we come to you, pleading with you, actually, that you would imbibe it in us, that we would be known for the power of God working in us.

[29 : 49] And so we ask that you do that. We thank you that you are the author, the founder, the establisher, the builder of the church, that you want a people for yourself.

And so we ask for this in his name alone. Amen.