

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 4:28-29 - Put Off, Renew, Put On - Part 2

Alright, we are in this super practical section of Ephesians 4 where Paul has laid out how we as believers get sin out of our lives. Obviously the way that we are justified - the way we have a right standing before God is through faith alone in Jesus alone. We do not contribute any works to our salvation. God does not forgive us on the basis of how much sin we remove from our lives.

But the Bible is clear that those who are saved are those who will actively be seeking to live holy lives and mortify sin in the flesh.

1 John 3:7-8: Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

There many verses like this. The way of following Jesus is the way of holiness, purity and putting off sin.

Here, Paul gives us the very practical steps of how to get sin out of our lives. And it's really a principle we should have learned very early on in our Christian walk. **Read 20-24**

This is the way the Ephesians learned Christ. When they were baby Christians they were taught these steps. This is the put off, renew your mind, put on principle. It's sort of a biblical formula for sanctification. Sanctification means to become more like Jesus.

And there are a lot of formulas in the world.

Dave Ramsey has his 7 baby steps to financial wealth.

Alcoholics Anonymous has their 12 step plan.

Stephen Covey had 7 Habits of highly effective people back in the 90s.

There's a book called Atomic Habits that lays out 4 steps to radically change your life.

Why are these so popular - and in many cases effective? I think the reason these step programs are so successful is that they demystify how to succeed at something. They give us a simple path forward.

Now, not every step program is legitimate, I've got some issues with AA and I'd quibble with Dave Ramsey on some things. But I think the allure is that if we do this, we will usually succeed.

Think about Legos. If you've ever opened a big Lego toy it's a box with random plastic parts, but the deal is that if you just follow the steps you too will have a really cool looking race car or rocket ship. If you just follow the steps you'll succeed.

When it comes to sanctification, I think this principle is the closest thing we have in the Bible to a step program to sanctification.

If you're a Christian - you've confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead - then your desire given to you by the Holy Spirit is to be holy as he is holy.

But sometimes the Christian life feels like you just opened a huge box of spiritual Legos and we don't know how to put all the pieces together.

Well, this section is how to put the pieces together of your sanctification. It's 3 steps:

1) We put off sin. We put off specific actions and attitudes that are sinful. So if this is you, or this is you counseling a friend, you're literally going to write a list of things to never do again. "I don't need a list" Yes you

do. A list clarifies your sin also allows other people to hold you accountable. And if we fail, we stop immediately, apologize, ask for forgiveness, make it right. Redouble our efforts to kill the sin.

2) We renew our minds in truths about that sin. Maybe we do a Bible study on the particular sin we're struggling with, memorize some passages, maybe we read a book on the issue or listen to some sermons.

We're filling our mind with truth that we can hang on to that will change the course of our life.

Psalm 119:11: I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

One of the best reasons to memorize Scripture is because when you have the Bible in your head all the time it's hard to sin. You're tempted to sin and if you've got 8 Bible verses coming to mind convicting you, encouraging you, warning you - it's going to keep you from sin.

3) And then we put on righteous living. We plan for specific positive actions that we are going to do when times are difficult. We replace sinful action with positive ones.

We've already seen it's not enough just to not lie, we also have to tell the truth.

We can't just not sin in anger, we also have to be actively about the business of reconciliation. Blessed are the peacemakers.

And by the way this is basically what biblical counseling is. When I counsel people what I'm basically trying to do is help them think through either what sins they need to put off that maybe they're not seeing. Or helping them renew their mind by thinking through a topic biblically. "How do I deal with my in laws, stubborn neighbor, get porn out of my life? How do I stop making dumb financial decisions that make my family nervous?" We're thinking through these things. And then how do we put on righteous behavior.

And you can do this too with people in the church. Paul says in **Romans 15:14** that the whole church in Rome is competent to counsel - able to instruct one another.

They all know these principles, so they can apply it to themselves and others. Sometimes we need a third party to help us through a situation. We can't see it clearly. We can all do this.

So when someone comes to me, I think through some things.

I'm not your doctor so I can't help you medically. Maybe you need to go get a physical or bloodwork or whatever to make sure some of your issue isn't physical problem. Maybe you've got low thyroid or testosterone or vitamin D or brain cancer. They can test for physical stuff. I can't.

I'm also not your therapist, so I'm not gonna just nod and say "mmm-hmmm" for an hour. We're actually going to try to get to the heart of things.

I'm not God so I can't change your circumstances.

So what that leaves me with - and you with - is how do we put off sin, renew our minds with truth - and put on righteous behavior that pleases the Lord? Sometimes the situations are complicated so we need wise counsel to think through it well.

But I can do that and you can do that and we can walk each other through.

Okay, we've seen this principle worked out so far with lying and sinful anger. What else does Paul mention here?

3) Stealing. **Read 28**

Here we're at stealing. The word here is kleptwn - you've heard of someone who is a kleptomaniac? A kleptomaniac is someone who compulsively steals. Klepto is the Greek word for stealing. The same root word is used for both the word thief and the word steal. To steal something is to be a thief and a thief steals.

Here's some common things that are stolen:

- Money
- Gambling is stealing - you're trying to take something from someone else, they're trying to steal it from you. You didn't earn it. And before you say "well we all agreed to it" just remember that's justification people give for adultery and MMA.
- Maybe you're a kid and you steal candy, or video game time or your brother's toys.
- Steal credit from others at work, group projects.
- Copyright permissions.
- Inventions
- Stealing wifi from a neighbor.
- Netflix recently cracked down on people stealing access to their streaming service and I think Amazon has too.
- Taxes
- Steal services from the government
- People file bankruptcy which is another form of theft

It's a violation of the 8th commandment: you shall not steal.

So in this put off phase, what we have to do is identify the specific actions we're doing that fall under "taking what is not ours." And covenant with God to not do it. And just like the other sins, we stop immediately all forms of theft.

And if we've done it we confess it, apologize for it, ask forgiveness and make it right. Immediately when it happens.

I mean imagine that: you're stealing your neighbors WiFi and you you go knock on the door and say "Hey man, I'm sorry but I've been taking what's not mine, that was wrong, will you forgive me. And by the way here's \$200 to pay toward your internet bill."

First of all, that would be an amazing testimony of repentance to your neighbor. Maybe he hates you and calls you names - which you'd deserve. Or maybe he says no big deal keep your money. But either way he knows you're conscience is soft and your repentance is real.

Second, you're probably not ever gonna steal again if you've got to go through that humiliating situation of asking for forgiveness. You've introduced the shame of stealing into your life by confessing it and that shame will keep you from doing more shameful things.

By the way, in the Law, the punishment for stealing was steep. If you stole an ox, you paid back 5 fold. If you stole a sheep, you paid back 4 fold. Remember Zacheaus? He was the short guy in the tree wanting to see Jesus? He said if he had defrauded anyone he repaid 4-fold. Remember what Jesus said? Today salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham. **Luke 19:1-10**

Beloved, if you've stolen something, you should repay in such a way that the person rejoices when you repent. That kind of repentance is how you know you're truly a child of Abraham.

So we put it off. Then we renew our mind. What's the actual truth here that Paul gives for us to renew our mind with? **Read 28**

Here's the truth: Christians should work so that we can bless others. Paul says let him labor. Work. Work is the opposite of stealing. Work generates value for you and others. Theft takes value from others.

So we work. Unless the work we're doing is sinful in and of itself. Maybe you're moonlighting as an assassin or you're running drugs or something. But for the most part work is intrinsically good. Adam and Eve were

commanded to work before the fall in Genesis 3. Before there was sin, there was an expectation by God that we would work with our hands.

He made us to be worker bees, taking dominion of the planet. That's a good thing. Paul says do that - do honest work. What is honest work? It's hard work to the glory of God.

It doesn't matter if you're blue collar, white collar. Making minimum wage, making 6 figures, whatever - go work. Even you retired folks, you need to work. Maybe not punch a clock, but you need to be doing in something in your life that generates value. We get hints of retirement in the Bible, but more than that we just get the idea that older folks work less and train and help younger folks how to work to the glory of God.

Why do we work? We work to provide for ourselves, but we should also have a reserve for others who might be in need. **Read 28**

See, when a thief becomes a Christian, they go through a radical transformation. They no longer take and harm others, they now work hard in order to give and bless others. That's how you know the transformation in a person has taken place.

Paul says in **Acts 20:35**: Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

As Christians we want to be blessed. How do we do that? Give to those who are truly in need.

Now, that's the truth here. And it's a good word. But let's drill down for a few more minutes. As I've said, with almost every sin we have to dig down a little more and see what's really going on in our hearts, or the hearts of those we're talking to. Why do we steal? What's the allure? Not everybody steals for the same reason and so we might need to renew our minds with other aspects of truth.

Lazy - you don't want to work or work harder, so you take from others.

Bored - stealing gives you a thrill. I knew kids who stole random things in middle school because it was a fun thrill.

Vengeance - you want to steal something from someone who wronged you. Stealing is payback. Maybe you're getting an enemy back, or the government back, or your parents or whoever.

Pride - you're poor and you're too proud to ask for something. You remember in **Luke 16** Jesus gives the parable of the dishonest manager? He basically settles with his master's debtors for a discounted price so that when he's fired those debtors will treat him nicely? He mentions a list of reasons he does this, one is that he is too proud to beg. It's shameful to ask for things, so he steals.

There's usually a few sins that are contributing to the issue. And we need to kill all of them.

And so part of renewing our mind is seeing what Scripture has to say about those contributing factors.

Prov. 9:17: Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant...it leads to death.

Prov. 10:2 treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Theft is a false hope that often leads to death. Look at Enron, look at bank robbers, look Martha Stewart. About the only people who get away with stealing in broad daylight are politicians.

Prov. 11:1 A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.

It's interesting that stealing and lying often go hand in hand. You lie to someone about the weight you're using to measure goods so that you can steal from them.

Turn to 1 Tim. 6:6-10. There are many other places we could look to renew our minds when it comes to stealing. But one essential aspect I think we need to have to curb it is contentment. Are you just content with what God has given you? Are you joyful?

And are you joyful when other people make a windfall profit or get a huge raise or promotion? Look what Paul says here. He's talking about the contrast between false teachers and true believers. **Read 1-5**

What are false teachers doing? They think they can pawn off godliness for riches. The health and wealth heresy that if you truly trust in God he'll make you rich is just that: heresy.

You might be rich today, or one day. Or maybe never. God has never promised anyone riches in this life. And so if you're following Jesus thinking he's going to reward you with money because you're doing all these good things, I've got news for you.

The proverbs are filled with passages that talk about how diligent work usually leads to riches and prosperity. But not always. They're not promises. Look what Paul says here. **Read 6-10**

We steal because we want gain. Paul says if you want true, eternal gain, just be content. You didn't bring anything in, you're not going to bring anything out of this life.

Listen, God owes us nothing but instant death the moment we sin. Anything above that is pure grace. So if you have food and clothing - and that's all you have - God says we can be content.

Desiring riches plays weird games with people. That's the point of the rest of this section. When people get greedy, they hurt themselves. Just look at the language he uses. Greed is begging for injury. **Read 9-10**

Snare, ruin, destruction, evil, apostasy, piercing, pangs. I mean, if you like being stabbed a bunch, just clamor after riches. You like stepping on bear traps? Just love money.

Money isn't bad. Money can do amazing things. It's the love of money. It's the desire to take.

The love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. Think about that. That's kind of what I've been getting at. Sometimes you have to dig down to see what the root of your sin is. If it's stealing there's a love of money - or stuff - that's there. Because you're not loving God or people when you steal. And that love of money is probably causing you to sin in other areas as well.

So these are truths we need to keep in mind in the battle of riches. By the way, I memorized this section. Why? Because sometimes the love of money creeps in. And I know it can cause other sins. I don't want to steal, I don't plunge myself or my family into ruin chasing riches.

It's okay if I'm lower middle class all my life. It's okay you are too. It's okay if you're poor. It's okay if you're sitting on a boat load of cash. But all of us have to guard our heart against greed.

Let's look back at **Eph 4**. So we put off stealing, we renew our mind with the truth that we should desire to share with those in need,

What do we put on? We put on that generosity. **Read 28**

Part of Christian love is that we should be ready to share with those who need help. We want to get to a point of having enough in our life that we can easily help those who are in true need.

Rom. 12:13 We're called to contribute to the needs of the saints.

1 Tim 6:18: we're called to be generous and ready to share.

In order to be ready to share it means you have to have some extra to give out. It's okay to have extra.

You guys who are well off, you should consider how to bless those in our congregation who are not as well off and maybe have needs.

Those of you in the congregation who aren't well off - don't act like you are well off. But your goal should be to move toward that. Get out of the financial bind ASAP and get to a position where you can be generous to others.

God has been generous to us in the gospel to make us his sons and daughters and give us the whole Kingdom. Why would we take from others? When we can imitate his generosity?

4) Speech. **Read 29-30**

Alright, we should all probably feel some conviction here. Everyone struggles with what we say.

James 1:26: If anyone thinks he's religious and doesn't bridle his tongue his religion is worthless.

Ouch. He goes on to say that no human can tame the tongue, it's a restless evil. If you could tame the tongue you'd be a perfect man. That's not possible. So there's a sense in which we're going to be battling our mouths until we're in glory.

Jesus says that part of the issue with the tongue is that it's actually a window into our heart. Out of the heart the mouth speaks. So when we say vile things what happening is that our hearts are being exposed.

Imagine you're walking around with a coffee cup. And the coffee cup is filled with slander and vileness and complaining and all manner of nasty things. And you're walking around and it's fine, nothing comes out. But what if someone bumps you? Or scares you. Or makes you mad and you're shaking? What happens with the stuff in the coffee cup? It comes out. It was always there, it just needed an opportunity.

That's how our mouths are. The vileness we have is in our heart, the hard times is when it comes out.

Okay, so what do we put off? Corrupting talk. That word corrupting is the word for spoiled food. It's used of fish that sat out too long. You ever smelled fish that sat out too long? Gross.

It's also used of rotten trees that produce gross fruit that no one would eat. We used to have a pear tree in our backyard that only produced these hard inedible pears, finally I cut it down.

We need to put off rottenness coming from our mouths. Every last bit of rottenness needs to stop.

No more complaining. It's the old adage if you don't have something nice to say, what? Don't say it at all. That's actually a biblical concept.

No complaining, no reviling, no lying, no swearing, no blasphemy, no fake Christian swearing - darn and shoot and fudge.

As Spurgeon said: if you're going to sin, sin boldly. Don't do it half hearted. I mean if you're going to punch God in the face in rebellion, you better close your fist and give it all you got.

Are you generally just unpleasant to be around in conversation? You should learn how to be a better conversationalist. Joyful and pleasant. There are few people I cross paths with all the time - I can't get away from them but they're like Eeyore. You know Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh? "Something always happens to me." There's like this rain cloud of depression that clouds their existence. They haven't had a good day in years and they suck you in with their misery and complaining.

That should never be Christians. If all you do is complain about your life and mope about you need to close your mouth. Don't let that stuff out anymore. We can have bad days, and even hard seasons. But what comes out of our mouths should not be unbecoming.

So, we make a list. I'm big on lists. Because it makes you face the reality of your situation.

So the idea is sometimes what comes out of our mouths is foul and moldy. It's raunchy and no one wants it. Let none of that come out of our mouths.

What comes out of your mouth that's rotten and raunchy? Swear words? Gossip? Complaining?

I have a buddy who's a counselor and he said he was doing marriage counseling with a couple and the guy swore a lot. And he asked him what words he used. And the guy said, you know, like the F word and the H word. And so my buddy asked what those words were. And he was embarrassed to say them. So finally he choked it out. AND then my buddy wrote the exact words in big letters on the white board behind him and just let them stay there the rest of the counseling session so the guy had to stare at it. At the end of the counseling time he said "Next week I'm going to ask you for a report of which words you used and we'll put them back up on the board again." You know how many he said the following week? Zero. Why? It's shameful. But sometimes you have to experience the shame to feel it's effects.

So when unwholesome words come out, we stop, apologize immediately, ask forgiveness, make it right and don't do it again.

What truth do we hang on to to renew our mind? **Read 29**

The truth Paul mentions here is that our words are a conduit of grace. Our mouths can throw fiery, satanic darts or they can be words of pure grace from the throne of God.

There have been so many times when I've been down and out and one of you guys will give me some words of grace. My wife is amazing at this. It's like, wow, that's what I imagine Jesus would say if he were right here.

We have the opportunity to do that with our words. To shower sinners with grace. Grace is unmerited favor. We get to be like Jesus saying "Go and sin no more" or "I forgive you" or whatever the case may be.

So we put off bad words, corrupting words. We renew our minds. What do we put on? **Read 29**

Words that are good for building up, that fit the occasion. That's our goal as Christians, especially to other Christians. We want to build them up. We want them to be more like Jesus. **Read 5:18-21**

This means our words should exude Scripture and biblical truth. And they need to fit the occasion. You ever talked with someone who said weird things and weird times? It's like "okay, that's kind of random and not at all what I'm dealing with but thanks"? Yeah, don't be that guy. Our words should edify at the proper time.

I'm going to compliment my employees 5 times today.

I'm going to thank my wife for 4 things every evening that she does for our family.

I'm going to call make a reminder on my phone to send an encouraging text to my friend at this time every day. Whatever it is - give grace to those who hear.

For the glory of God. And the love of others.

Pray