

# If I Am a Butterfly, Why Am I Still Crawling?

## Ephesians 4:22-24

Since 1986, Greg Boyle or G-Dog, as he's known in his neighborhood, has been engaging the gangs East Los Angeles with the gospel. Every day, he wades into the danger zone, connecting with young men and women who already have long arrest and prison records. He shares the good news of Jesus with them, and calls them to break with the wicked life they have known and trust Christ for salvation. The message is simple and real: you can have a future or a funeral. Jesus will forgive your sins, wash your past clean in the eyes of God, and give you a hope and a future.

To date, this ministry has seen members of about thousands leave the pseudo-family of a gang for the real family of God by faith in Christ Jesus. And that's not because Boyle has watered down the gospel. In fact, he makes plain that Jesus is calling them to radically break all the destructive, sin-inducing ties to their former life. Over 1500 ex-gang members have trusted Christ and taken steps in a new direction with the guidance and help of Greg Boyle. They have to learn a new language, buy new clothes and learn how to make an honest day's wage.

source: Jill Carattini, "A Slice of Infinity," No. 1186, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (6-23-06), online at <http://www.preachingtoday.com> see also Edward Iwata, USA TODAY, "Homeboy Industries Goes Gangbusters" (7-11-05), online at <http://www.usatoday.com>

That sounds like what we have talked about the last couple of weeks from Ephesians 4. A true Christian will undergo metamorphosis, a change of nature that renovates core values and imprints Christ's character to your inner life. Remember Ephesians 2:10? **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** How about 2:19 and 22, **"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ... in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."**? This is change from the inside out. The speed of this internal overhaul, which is often called sanctification, will vary from person to person. But the certainty is rock solid.

So because we are new creations in Christ, Paul urges us to live up to who we are. He said in Eph. 4:1, **"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."** Change *that* radical on the inside inevitably shows itself in your behavior on the outside.

So far in chapter 4 we have applied the scripture to our lives in this way:

1. **Every believer** is **Called** to change live a changed life. Ephesians 4:1-5.
2. This change makes us **Christ**-like. Ephesians 4:1-6
3. **Christ's defeat** of sin, death and Satan makes this change **Possible**. Ephesians 4:7-10.
4. **The church** is God's primary **Agent** of change in our lives as Christ gifts and equips us to serve Him together. Ephesians 4:11-16.

So Paul says that we cannot continue to live like the rest of the unbelieving world because it contradicts who we are in Christ. Becoming like Christ is your calling, your purpose for breathing, your reason for living. It's Jesus; everything else is secondary.

But there is one part of this entire study that stops me in my tracts. Here is the hard truth: I don't measure up to this all the time. You might be saying, "So what's wrong with me, pastor? **"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day,"** but I fail so much! What's wrong with me? If I'm supposed to be a butterfly or something, soaring above sin, why am I still crawling?

This morning, I want to continue this series in Ephesians 4 by hitting the all-important point where the rubber meets the road. Listen to Ephesians 4:22-24:

**22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,**  
**23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,**  
**24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**

Today I want to share three simple principles for a changed life as Paul outlines them here: Put off the old man; Be renewed in your mind; Put on the new man.

### **1. Put Off the Old You (Eph. 4:22).**

This phrase "**put off**" describes a decisive moment, not a gradual decision. This is not negotiation; this is the end. The verb literally means to strip off, as you would clothing that is filthy.

Paul says get those old habits that marked your Christless days off your back and out of your life. Throw it away! Cut the root! Don't go to those websites anymore. Throw away those magazines and don't buy anymore. Don't hang out with those people that keep you doing things you know are wrong. Those old ways are dead to you now. So get rid of every trace!

Paul's phrase is literally, "**the old man.**" He identifies this as being "**concerning your former conduct.**" So the old man refers to all that we were before we were saved, when we were ruled by the evil desires and practices (Ep 4:19; Eph 2:3). Paul uses the same phrase in Colossians 3:9-10 saying, "**Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.**"

And also in Romans 6:6 he talks about the old man where he says, "**knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.**"

What you might have noticed in Romans 6:6 and in Col. 3:9, Paul refers to the putting off or crucifying of the old man as an accomplished fact. It's a done deal. When Christ died on the cross, we died with Him positionally. When He was raised from the dead, we were raised up with Him. Our old man died and was put off. But although this is true of us, we have to live this truth out every day for it to make a difference. So Paul says in Romans 6:11, "**Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

We must daily apply experientially the facts that are true of us positionally. So, yes, at the moment we got saved, we put off the dirty clothes of the old life. Our old self was crucified with Christ. But, every day we must reckon that

this is so by putting off everything associated with the old life and putting on the new life in Christ.

When Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, they were officially free from their many years of servitude, but some of them went on living as if they were still slaves. The President's proclamation gave them legal standing as free citizens. It was a done deal—they were no longer slaves. But, out of habit and way of thinking, many of these poor people still lived like slaves. So, they needed to live in accordance with the new facts. When they were tempted to think like a slave, they needed to say, "No, the truth is I am now a free man!" They needed to appropriate that truth into their daily experience.

Can I tell you how that happened with those gang members who were rescued by Jesus in Los Angeles? Greg Boyle told them that the gang tattoos had to go. Gang tattoos link them to a past that no longer defines them and can put them in serious danger on the streets. So Boyle created a free service using local doctors to remove them, thereby scrubbing their bodies of the last remaining marks of their rebel past.

It was not an easy procedure. Many of these street-tough people say it feels like hot grease being poured on their skin. "Yet the list of those waiting to go in a new direction grows longer each day, each name representing another life that longs to be free and is willing to endure pain to seize it." **Source:** Jill Carattini, "A Slice of Infinity," No. 1186, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (6-23-06), online at <http://www.preachingtoday.com>

It may cause you pain to break ties with old friends that are ruining your faith. It may bug you to stop doing some things that used to provide temporary pleasure. If you want to really live the Christ-life here's where you start: no more double life. No more straddling the fence. Make a decision right now to cut the ties that link you to ways that are not Christ's ways.

So how do I make that happen in my life? Verse 23:

## 2. **Be Renewed in the Spirit of Your Mind (Eph. 4:23).**

Verse 23 says, "**and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.**" The verb "**Be renewed**" is a present passive infinitive, which means that it is an ongoing process that God performs in us as we cooperate with Him. It means an ongoing, progressive shift is happening in your thinking. God is increasing the capacity of your mind to spiritually discern the options and decisions with which you are faced. Being renewed in the spirit of your mind means a new, never before way of thinking is taking root.

Just as "**the spirit of the world**" (1Co 2:12) is the principle that controls the world, or makes it what it is, the "**spirit of your mind,**" is the principle that controls your mind. Paul means that our entire way of thinking and what controls our thinking needs renewal.

It means what Romans 12:2 says when it commands, "**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**" This mind-renewal is a deep spiritual change in how the mind assesses and values things. It acts like an early warning system, or a kind of

spiritual filter, stopping temptation that used to fly under the radar and get to me.

So how does this fine-tuning of the mind to spiritual realities take place? 2 Cor. 3:18 offers a parallel verse that shows us. **“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

We **become** what we constantly **behold**. If I give my time to gazing intently at the television, I will adopt the ways and words of what I see. If I look deeply into the glory of God by filling my mind with His word, my mind will be reprogrammed so that I take on the mind of Christ.

Leroy Eims told of how the scripture worked in his life to renew his mind and change his behavior. As a new Christian, he was reading through Colossians 3:8: **“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”** Leroy said, *“I tried to slide past it, but he kept bringing me back to the words ‘get rid of anger.’ ‘I had a violent temper. Whenever it flared, I’d haul up and bash my fist into the nearest door. Even though I often bloodied my knuckles and once completely smashed a beautiful diamond-and-onyx ring my wife had given me, I couldn’t seem to stop. Yet here was God’s Word: ‘Get rid of anger.’*

*“So I made a covenant with God. I promised him I was going to work on it. My first step was to memorize the verse and review it daily. I prayed and asked the Lord to bring this verse to mind whenever I might be tempted to lose my temper. And I asked my wife to pray for me and remind me of this verse if she saw me failing in my promise to the Lord. So Colossians 3:8 became a part of my life and gradually removed that sin from me.”* Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*; found in *Men of Integrity* (May/June 2006), May 5; online at <http://www.preachingtoday.com>

That brings us to the third principle:

### 3. **Put On the New You (Eph. 4:24).**

Verse 24 says, **“and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”**

In v. 22, we were urged to shed the old clothes of our former way of life. Now, the Holy Spirit instructs us to put on something brand new, created by God to fit you perfectly, but with a likeness to God in true righteousness and holiness.

Again, I believe that the sense is that we did put on this new man once and for all at the point of conversion, but we must continue putting on this new man every day by making true in our experience what is actually true of us positionally. In other words, we must live by applying the truth of the new man in every situation that we face. Paul will make this very practical when he give several examples in the next few verses.

But here the point is that although we must decide daily to put on the new man, this is ultimately a work of God. So the verse says, **“new man which was created according to God.”** One of the greatest dangers in seeking to change for the better, to become more Christ-like, is believing it’s simply a matter of “trying harder,” or that it’s up to my will power. The changed life of

the believer is not something that we must conjure up by our own will power. God created us anew in Him. It is not just a matter of trying harder.

At the same time, we must walk in the good works that He has prepared for us. While it is a lifelong process of renewal, you should be able to see the distinct difference between the old person that you were and the new person that you now are in Christ. You should be able to relate to the old preacher who said, *"I ain't what I want to be and I ain't what I'm gonna be, but praise God, I ain't what I used to be!"*

One day, it will all be over. I will be like Him because I will see Him as He is. Ruth Bell Graham saw a sign along a strip of highway that she would like carved in her gravestone. It read, "End of construction. Thank you for your patience." Meanwhile, this "work in progress" needs intentional, deliberate focus on the target that drives the passion to become like Jesus. That means stripping away this world from my life, having my mind renewed by God's Word, and purposefully living out my new identity in Christ.

What will it look like this week to follow God's three-fold principle for transformation? Be as specific as possible.

(a) I will "put off" \_\_\_\_\_ this week by . . .

(b) I will "renew my mind" this week by . . .

(c) I will put on \_\_\_\_\_ this week by . . .