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Rick Myatt

NO MORE TYPEWRITER RIBBON  
2 Corinthians 5:17

Have you seen the clip of the news report on KTVU television station in Oakland following the Asiana Airlines crash that has caused quite a furor? Evidently someone with a very ill-timed sense of humor managed to get fake names for the cockpit crew of that unfortunate aircraft into their report. They announced on the air that the pilots of that ill-fated flight were Captain Sum Ting Wong and Officer We Tu Lo. Apparently a summer intern at the NTSB confirmed these were the names. That intern was summarily fired. Don't you find it hard to believe that no one at the TV station smelled a rat when they saw those names? Sum Ting Wong and We Tu Lo, seriously? Yet they went on the air with it in their rush to have the story before anyone else and ended up looking like buffoons. I suspect there were quite a few people at that station who would really like to be a new thing, to have a new start that didn't include their participation in that little debacle. They would like to put that behind them and go on as though it never existed.

Most of us, maybe all of us, wish we were different. The idea of a new start, a fresh beginning in which we can be different and do things differently is deliciously appealing to us. There's a key line in *Romeo and Juliet* in which Shakespeare had Romeo say, "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized; Henceforth I never will be Romeo." He believes if Juliet loves him he will be a new man, and that's what we all want. In his book, *Blue Like Jazz* (p. 29) Donald Miller wrote, "Everybody wants to be fancy and new. Nobody wants to be themselves. I mean, maybe people want to be themselves, but they want to be different." Is it possible to be new, different? Today we will consider the implications of one verse from the Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:17. That verse tells us that it is possible to be new and in the process promises something that is crucial to being antifragile.

YOU ARE A NEW THING

This verse begins with "therefore," thus informing us that what Paul says is based on what he had just said in verses 14-16. Verses 14-15 said that the love of Christ has controlled us and that now we live not for ourselves but for Christ, who died for us. We have a whole new purpose. So, Paul said in verse 16, "we regard no one from a worldly point of view." In other words, we see the world differently. We look at people in an entirely new way. Our whole perspective has changed, our value system is completely different. We think differently now because Christ is what our lives are about.

Paul says we are a brand new thing. We are not like the world around us. We have a completely different paradigm, a different system of thinking, a different approach to life. ***In Christ we are new!*** He says the old has gone. The Greek word translated "old" is *archaia*. We get the word "archaic" from it. The person we used to be before Christ's love exploded into our lives is archaic. It is a part of the past.

When you think of what you were before Christ became your Lord and Savior think of typewriter ribbon, for instance. Some of you younger people don't even know what a typewriter ribbon is. Just so you'll know, in the bad old days when you had a paper assigned in a class at school you didn't whip it up using Microsoft Word on your laptop then email it to your teacher. You also didn't go to some web site and buy a paper. You wrote the essay out using a pen and paper, then you typed it on a typewriter. That machine had a ribbon with ink on it, and it had keys that would slam into the ribbon thereby imprinting ink on paper in the shape of the letter you wanted. When was the last time you saw a typewriter ribbon? I can't even remember. I was surprised to learn that you can still buy them from Office Depot, but why would you want to? Such a thing has no use these days. It is archaic, unnecessary, outdated and useless.

Paul is telling us the same is true of what we used to be. It is archaic, useless. We don't need or want it anymore. We now are a whole new thing. The new thing, a brand new creature, has come. If you are a believer in Jesus, you are this brand new thing. That old, archaic thing you used to be is gone. Good riddance. Doesn't that sound good? Have you ever been exhausted over a period of time then finally had a good night's rest. Someone asks how you are and you say, "I feel like a whole new man" or "a whole new woman." Wouldn't it be great to have a fresh start and be a whole new person?

This week Laurie and I came back from a walk and stopped to visit with our neighbors. They were in their front yard with their two little boys. They were playing with an air pressure rocket launcher. This is a toy that has a foam rocket that you launch by stepping on what is essentially an air pump, forcing the air into the rocket and hurling it into the sky. Both the boys loved launching the thing, but they really loved it when their daddy did it because the rocket went so high. They wanted Laurie to launch it and she did. Then they wanted me to launch it, but I declined. I didn't want to do it because there was a tall palm tree nearby, and I was sure that if I launched that rocket it would end up stranded in that tree. That's the way my life goes. I didn't want to lose their rocket, so I said no thanks. They launched a couple more then insisted again that I try it. They really wanted me to join in the fun. Finally I capitulated. I approached the thing like a man walking to the gallows. I knew that this would end badly. I stomped on the pump and boom, that rocket shot out of there like it was on its way to the moon. It was the highest launch yet. As it arced over and headed down I saw to my great relief that it had cleared the palm tree. Not so fast, Myatt. Just as it headed down a breeze kicked in and blew it farther away, right into another palm tree where it got stuck in the branches about 20 feet up. As I had foreseen I had just lost their rocket. Why do these things always happen to me?

I would really like to have a new life, one where I'm not a klutz, one where when I do things they don't always somehow turn out bad. That would be terrific. I want that new life. However, that's not the new thing that we are promised in this passage. I will still have a Charlie Brown life with everything going wrong, but my life will be different in more important ways. Some of those have to do with what we saw a couple of weeks ago in verses 14-15. We live with a new purpose, to serve Christ. We have different values and see people

in a new way, the way God sees them. But it also means we will live in a different way. How will it be different? What is this new creation like?

### YOU HAVE HAD A LUST TRANSPLANT

Lust transplant! Wow, that sounds really juicy. If we had a few more sermons like this maybe more people might start showing up for church. All these G-Rated sermons don't appeal in today's culture. This is going to be the first R-Rated sermon ever, right? In a word, no. Sorry to disappoint you. Let me explain what I mean. Later in his life Paul wrote what was essentially a brief commentary on this idea of being a new creation. It's found in Ephesians 4:20-24. It explains what this new life is like. In the context before those verses Paul had been writing about what life was like before we came to Christ. It was a life characterized by futility. That is a big point. **The human condition is one of futility**, of being separated from God and having a hardened heart. It was a life most accurately described as having "a continual lust for more." It was never satisfied, never at peace, always wanting something else, always restless. That well describes the human race. Then Paul wrote, "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."

### **The old life had deceptive desires.**

Verse 22 communicates some crucial things. It says that the old life was being corrupted by its deceitful desires. That was the core of the problem. That is the heart of the human condition. It is the source of all our angst, our distance from God, our conflicts with each other. The King James translated the word "desires" by the word "lusts" which really gets some people fired up. Unfortunately the word "lust" has taken on a meaning that is much more narrow than it originally was. It conjures up images of people hooked on pornography or of old time fiery preachers yelling at their congregations about the horrors of lust. They seem focused on sex as the problem for everything.

But the old English word "lust" just meant a strong want. It did not have specifically sexual connotations. The same is true of the Greek word that Paul used here. It meant a powerful desire. In Luke 22:15 Jesus used the Greek word for lust when he told his disciples "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The word Luke used for "eagerly desire" is the same one used in Ephesians 4:22. That's why modern translations use the word "desire" because this is referring to things that, while they certainly include sexual desire, also include way more than that. In fact, the desires spoken of here encompass nearly all of life.

The desires Paul spoke of, the lusts, could be almost any human desire. They could include desires for safety, for food, for money, for success, for approval from other people, for love, for a house, for a particular car, for sex, for more sex or more exciting sex, for acceptance, for friends, for fame, for power, for a career or a job, for a good marriage, for children, for

success for your children, for jelly doughnuts, for a thin body, for better hair, for security or for almost anything you can imagine.

What did Paul mean by “deceitful desire”? A deceitful person is one who deceives. When we deceive someone we try to make them think we’re doing one thing when we’re actually doing something else. Football, for instance, is a game that often involves deceit. One common example is a draw play where the offense tries to make the defense think they’re going to pass. The defensive linemen rush in to attempt to sack the quarterback before he can throw, the linebackers and defensive backs drop into pass coverage, and then the qb hands the ball to a running back who runs the ball, hopefully catching the defense by surprise. The offense shows the defense one thing then does another.

That is the essence of deceitful desires. They show us one thing, then deliver another. They promise us something. We desire them because of what we think they can do for us, but they promise something that they never could and never will deliver. We desire things because we become convinced that they can give us peace of mind, joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction. In short, they are the key to having the life that we want. In his book, *The Journey of Desire* (p. 1), John Eldredge wrote, “There is a secret set within each of our hearts...It is the desire for life as it was meant to be. Isn’t there a life you have been searching for all your days?” He is right when he says that desire is there in us every single day. We keep thinking that there is something we must obtain to gain that life. And we are sure that if we can’t have the thing that we desire then we will never have the peace of mind, the joy, the fulfillment and the satisfaction we long for.

Therein lies the problem. All of those things that we desire cannot deliver what they seem to promise. Many of those things that we desire are good things. There is nothing wrong with them in and of themselves. The problem is they cannot deliver what they promise. Their promise is the deception.

As an example, consider an obvious one. In 2011 a paper was released by a team of psychologists from UCLA who analyzed the values of characters in popular TV shows of the past 4 decades, particularly those that appeal to young people. They discovered that being part of a community or group was the number one value depicted in those shows up through 1997. In the past decade that value had dropped on the list of values presented to 11<sup>th</sup>. The number one value now is “fame.” The message to people, especially kids, is that the most important thing is to be famous. In other words, you get life through fame. Fame promises popularity, riches, and all you could want in life. The premise is if you are famous then you’ll be happy, satisfied and fulfilled with your life. It is the life you desire. How does fame deliver on what it promises?

Jim Carrey, the comedic actor, said, “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.” Famous actor, Brad Pitt, in an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine said, “The emphasis now is on success and personal gain. I’m sitting in it, and I’m telling you, that’s not it.”

Writer Cynthia Heimel lives in New York and has had occasion to encounter a number of celebrities. Listen to what she said about them in an article in *The Village Voice*. “I pity celebrities, no I really do – Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, and Barbara Streisand, were once perfectly pleasant human beings. But now their wrath is awful. I think when God wants to play a really rotten practical joke on you he grants you your deepest wish and then laughs merrily when you realize you want to kill yourself. You see Sly, Bruce, and Barbara wanted fame. They worked, they pushed and the morning after each of them became famous they wanted to take an overdose. Because that giant thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything OK, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to provide them with personal fulfillment and happiness had happened and they were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable.” In other words, fame did not fulfill its promise and resulted only in disillusionment. It is a deceitful desire.

Here’s another example. For years Laurie and I wished we could buy a home. It seemed like a dream that would never be fulfilled. Then through the grace of God and the kindness of a number of people we were able to buy a home. It was wonderful. And it has been a real blessing. But last week do you know what we did at our home? We had to have people come and create a huge tent that covered our house then they pumped poison gas into it to kill the bugs that were eating the house. Don’t be smug, they’re eating yours too. It was a total pain. We had to put every single food item in the house into airtight bags and seal them. What a chore. Then we had to move out of the house for several days and come home knowing there had been poison gas everywhere in our house that we’re probably going to die from some day. Of course we had to turn the gas to the house off. When the guy from the gas company came to turn the gas on he informed us that our water heater is unsafe and is also pumping dangerous gas out. Talk about a dream.

Having the house is a good thing. There was nothing wrong with our desire to have one. But to whatever degree we thought it was going to make us happy, fulfilled, satisfied, at peace, joyful, we got disillusionment instead. The desire was an illusion! Like everything else in life, we got what we desired and it was a good thing, certainly not a bad thing, but life went on. We had no more fulfillment, no more joy, no more peace than we had before. You desire many things, some of them neutral, some of them good, hopefully none of them bad. When we think that those desires are going to be the answer we need, are going to satisfy our souls and give us life we are buying into an illusion that will only end in frustration.

The late Stanley Baldwin, former British prime minister, said, “The attainment of an ideal is often the beginning of disillusionment.” That’s because desires are deceitful.

### **Deceptive Desires Cause Ruin**

The old self, the old life, verse 22 says, was being corrupted by those deceitful desires. The word translated “corrupted” originally meant to destroy, to kill or to ruin. I remember when Toby was coaching high school football. His teams mostly were pretty good, but there were a few pretty ugly games in which they were badly overmatched. After one when I saw him before I even asked him about the game he said, “We just got ruined.” They got killed. They

were destroyed. That's what deceitful desires do to our lives. They destroy them, they ruin them.

How do deceitful desires ruin our lives? They cause us to pursue things that can never give us what we long for. So we spend so much energy, so much of our earthly resources, pursuing something that in the end will prove to be empty, unable to deliver. After repeated episodes of this over many years people can easily become cynical and hopeless.

A former track star lives up the street from us. She is now retired. I thought of her as I was thinking about this sermon. Did I mention that she is a greyhound dog? She used to run in dog races. Do you know how they get the dogs to run? They chase a mechanical rabbit. What would happen to a dog if he ever caught one? He's going to say, "Well I'll never do that again" because no dog wants a mechanical rabbit. What our desires do is keep us chasing that rabbit, unaware that it is a fool's errand. Unfortunately dogs are smarter than humans. When humans catch the rabbit they just go looking for a different rabbit or a bigger one.

I've encountered so many people in my years in ministry, who may have some faith in Jesus but what lights their fire, their real passion, the thing they are pursuing, is money, success, climbing the corporate ladder, making a name for themselves or being a star. Frankly all the talk about Jesus doesn't do much for them. They are convinced that what will really fill their souls is this thing they are pursuing. That's what's exciting, that's what will make them happy. It is somewhat understandable when it is a young person who is certain that being a star athlete or movie actor will fulfill the dream because their parents have probably helped them think that. But adults do it too. They appear to have no idea whatsoever that they are pursuing a mechanical rabbit. In so doing it keeps them from what they need most – to have a transforming experience of the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ that will give them hope, forgiveness, and a brand new life connected to God.

There's another aspect to how illusory desires ruin our lives. Those things we desire become so important to us that we might violate God's commands and teaching in our effort to obtain them. After all, the thing we desire is what we need most, not doing what God says. This is what is happening when a person distorts godly priorities in life. He believes the thing he is pursuing is so central to the life he desires that it rules his priority system. That's kind of subtle, but this problem can be more overt. I remember the guy who started with just distorting his priorities to the point where his marriage withered, causing his wife to become a bitter, lonely woman who was neglected by her husband. What ensued was predictable. Failing to figure out why his wife felt the way she did he blamed her and began to feel sorry for himself. Then he encountered a woman at work who admired him and appreciated him. It felt good. He wanted companionship, appreciation, real love. That desire became the thing he could not bear to live without. He had to have it for life to become full. It became his rabbit. And so, even though he knew it was wrong, he went after it. He and the woman started an adulterous affair. When he came to see me it was way too late. His wife had divorced him. His children wanted nothing to do with him. He had lost his job, lost any respect he had for himself, he was buried with guilt and felt utterly disconnected from God. His desire literally ruined his life.

James 1:14-15 says, “but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.”<sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

I will throw one more example of this at you. In the past 34 years I’ve encountered many married couples who were struggling. Time and time again I’ve seen deceitful desires undermining their marriages. One or both, usually both, spouses have something they desire. There is something they feel they must have to be fulfilled and happy. That thing becomes the thing that rules them. When they don’t get it they become hurt and angry. They manipulate their partner to try to get it. They unleash their anger on their spouse because that person is disappointing them. The spouse, of course, resists and resents the attempts at manipulation and when anger is poured out on them they return it. Meanwhile they are also hurt because they are not getting the thing they desire. It never seems to occur to people that it is their own desire that is, in fact, ruining the relationship. When I point this out I typically hear something along the lines of, “but I have a right to want this. I deserve this. I need this. I should have this in my marriage, shouldn’t I?” It is so hard to get people to see that as long as they are looking at what they desire and think they deserve and must have, they are not loving their spouse, and their desire is ruining their lives.

Many religions and philosophies throughout history have recognized this problem of desire. The Stoics and many eastern philosophies tell us the answer is to free ourselves from desire. If we can just get free of all desire, when nothing can hurt us. But our desires are central to who we are. Eldredge is right when he says in *Journey of Desire* (p. 23), “to kill desire is to kill my heart altogether.” To get rid of all desire is to cease to be human. So we must have another way of dealing with our desires.

The good news about all of this is that when we came to faith we had a lust transplant. God has given us a new set of desires. These are desires to know and serve him, to glorify him, to love other people without the need to get something from them. They are desires that bring love, joy, peace, patience and kindness into our souls. They are eternal desires that can bring the peace and joy we long for.

I am sure that you can see that what this means is that our tricky desires make us fragile. It is these very desires that put us at risk every moment of not getting what we think we need, and in fact guarantee that we will not have what is most important. They put us on the express train to disappointment and disillusionment because when we get what we desire we will find it is not what we hoped. The only way to become antifragile is to have a lust transplant, which is exactly what Paul said has happened.

## IMPLICATIONS

YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD CLOTHES

When we go back to 2 Corinthians 5:17 we see that Paul said this old life ended and we are a new creature with a new life. We have had that lust transplant. That old life, ruined by tricky desires is over. But we have a couple of problems with this.

First, it sounds like in Ephesians 4:20-24 Paul was telling us to put off the old life and to be made new in our minds and put on the new life. In other words, it sounds like something we're supposed to be doing now. This seems different than our verse in 2 Corinthians, which seems to say that the old life is already gone. This leads to some scholars saying that it is both, we have put the old life off and the new one on in the past, but that we also have to keep doing that on an on-going basis.

In Ephesians 4 Paul was not *commanding* them to do something, he was *reminding* them of something that has already happened. Pay attention to the tenses of the main verbs in verses 21-24. The main verbs are in verses 21-22, the verbs in verses 23-24 are dependent on the main verbs. The main verbs are "you heard of him" (past tense) and "were taught in him" (past tense). "You were taught" past tense. When were they taught? It was when they first heard about Jesus. In other words, when they put their faith in Christ they understood what they were accepting was a lust transplant. They knew their lives were being corrupted. They felt that. They likely did not understand why. When they heard the message of the gospel of grace they understood that deceitful desires were the problem and that in Christ they could receive a new set of desires that would begin to heal their lives.

When we first put our faith in Jesus Christ we were submitting to a lust transplant. Many of us did not understand this. I put my faith in Jesus when I was quite young. In my teenage years I probably looked to most people like a good Christian boy. I wasn't wild or rebellious. But I was pursuing deceitful desires. What I cared about was friends, sports, succeeding, being popular (which I wasn't especially). I had what I perceived to be eternal fire insurance and some religion. As I got to the end of my high school years I saw the emptiness of those deceitful desires. It really was only as I began college that I had the lust transplant and began to pursue the true desire.

The point of all of this is to change the way you think about yourself and your life. It is to clarify what is going on in your life. I want you to see yourself as someone who has changed clothes. You have had a lust transplant. God has given you a new set of desires that are the real thing. They do not deceive. That's how I want you to think of yourself. At your core you are a person with a new set of desires that are from God. You are a new creation.

You have had new desires transplanted in you. You want to obey God, you want to give yourself up to glorify him, you want to love him and serve him. You want to advance his kingdom. These are not natural human desires because our natural bent is to serve and take care of ourselves. Where did those desires come from? They have been transplanted into you by God, it happened when you came to know Jesus

**DON'T TRY TO CHANGE CLOTHES AGAIN**



Perhaps the biggest problem we all have is that it doesn't feel to us like we are new creations. We may find that those deceptive desires are entrenched pretty deeply in us. Laurie had one of those kind of quirky moments this week where those desires peeked out a little. On Monday she was going to make some enchiladas to take to a family that needed some help. She went to the store and bought the ingredients. She came home and started her food preparation only to realize that she had forgotten an ingredient. She told me she was going to have to go back to the store to get the missing ingredient. I heard the garage door open and close as she left. A little later I heard it open and close again as she returned. I was concentrating on my work so I wasn't paying much attention, but then I heard the garage door open and close again. I thought that was odd because I thought she had already come back. A little later I heard the door open and close again and the car return. Now I was really confused. I went downstairs to talk to her. She said, "After my second trip to the store I came back and started working and discovered that I also was missing tortillas. I had to go back to the store a third time." The little insight into what we all feel came after a pause. She said, "I went to a different store the third time." It wasn't because the other store didn't have tortillas, it was because she didn't want those people at the first store to see her showing up a third time and think she must be stupid.

We all have a desire to not be embarrassed by our mistakes. It never seems to go away. We have lots of those kinds of desires that are in us so deeply that it doesn't feel like they've been transplanted at all. Why are some of these deceptive desires so automatic, so persistent in us? Ephesians 2:2-3 refers to our sins, "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."

There are three elements in those verses that combine to work against us. Those elements have something in common. The elements are our own "flesh," which is that part of us that wants to live apart from God. Paul says it is the source of cravings and desires. The flesh is that part of us that is all about me. So it creates desires and tells us these desires must be the source of what we need for full life. It always points us away from God to something else. All of us have this "flesh" in us, so we will always have a tendency to listen to its appeals to look to some desire for life as long as that is something other than God.

Another factor in this stubbornness of deceptive desires is "the ways of the world." We are constantly being bombarded by a world around us. We are never shielded from it. One of the characteristics of the world's ways is that they also continually tell us God is not the answer. They always point us away from him. The last factor is called "the ruler of the kingdom of the air." That means Satan, who is as opposed to God as it is possible to be. He also is continually working on us, telling us to look somewhere besides God for the answer to life. So these three factors are continually pounding us, pulling at us, telling us to believe the deception of our own desires.

So how do we deal with this? First recognize **the problem most of the time is not the desires themselves**. There are desires that are wrong. If you desire to hurt or destroy someone, that is not a godly desire. But there is nothing wrong with desiring to have food, to be safe, to succeed, to have money, to have sex, to be loved, to have a great marriage. **The biggest problem is the deception that is attached to those desires**. The deception is you cannot really live, you cannot have joy, you cannot be at peace, you cannot be fulfilled unless you have what you desire. That's the dangerous lie. So key is submitting those desires to God, letting him decide which of them we receive and believing that we can still be whole and joyful whether we receive them or not.

Second then we must pay attention to the desires that God has transplanted into us. They are the desires to do his will, to bring him honor in all that we do, to know him better, to further his kingdom, to love people sacrificially. We must now recognize that those desires have been planted into us and they are our deepest desires. They are who we really are. Imagine that you have changed clothes. You have put on wedding clothes, for you women the wedding gown you've dreamed of all your life. For you men, blue velvet tuxedo like the one I wore in my wedding. Okay, maybe not, but perhaps a classy tuxedo. That is who you are. The question is, now that you are ready for the event, are you going to go find a sweaty, stinky t-shirt and grimy jeans to put on over your beautiful clothes? That would be terrible, so let's not do that.