



Inertia. It's one of the most powerful forces in the universe.

When I was still living at home, so I hadn't even been driving that long, I was in our local convenience store, a Kwik Trip type store. Ours was called Spee-D-Foods. As I was going into the store I noticed a car in the parking lot that was drifting backward. Without even thinking about it, I raced to the rear of the car and started pushing with all my might. Thankfully it was not going very fast or hadn't traveled very far and I was able to bring it to a stop. Just then the owner of the car came out, jumped in the car and put it in park. I thought it was interesting that she did not even thank me for saving her car but I think she was shocked and embarrassed by the whole thing.

Thankfully the power of inertia has just gotten started or either I would have been crushed or the car would have slid out into the road. Inertia is defined this way. "Inertia is the resistance of any physical object to any change in its state of motion. This includes changes to the object's speed, direction, or state of rest." So if you're trying to change something in your life, some negative pattern, some sinful habit, the power of inertia is going to be pulling at you to stand still and not get going.

But inertia also has a different side to it. "Inertia is also defined as the tendency of objects to keep moving in a straight line at a constant velocity." That's the kind of inertia I had to overcome to stop the car in the parking lot. But it's also the kind of inertia we experience when we try to change directions in life. Inertia keeps us from getting started and it keeps us moving steadily in the wrong direction.

Sin has tremendous inertia built into it. You may remember from last Sunday that sin grows a callous over your heart, then it gives you over to sensuality which finally leads to an insatiable greed for all manner of impurity. Paul gave a textbook definition of what an addiction looks like.

Even if a particular sin has not shackled us forever, it still has a lot of inertia. It's like stopping the momentum of a drifting car. First you have to overcome the inertia of the car going the wrong direction and then you need to get it started in the right direction. If we do this with our sin then we are practicing what the Bible calls repentance and what Paul calls "putting off the old self and then putting on the new self." Biblical repentance. Spiritual breathing. So necessary but not so easy to do.

I love the fact that the first time Paul landed in the city of Ephesus the pagans there experienced one of the greatest examples of repentance in the Bible. Let's read that story.

¹¹ And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

"Ephesus was full of wizards, sorcerers, witches, astrologers...and people who could read one's fortune by the palm of the hand."¹ Sound familiar? We had a former palm reader attending our church for a while. These pagans were really good pagans. They practiced magic by the power of demons. If you're gonna be a pagan you may as well be all in, right? They were all in—at least until they saw the genuine power of God—the power of Jesus' name. Notice the progression from pagan to believer in Jesus. First, fear fell upon them and the name of Jesus was extolled. That high regard for Jesus caused them to begin. "confessing and divulging their practices." In other words, they brought what was hidden in darkness and exposed it to the light. This was especially necessary when it came to their magic arts. The powerful part of magic was its secrecy. That's why they had all of books of magic spells. They were closely guarded secrets that cost a fortune. When they burned all of their books the value was calculated at 50,000 drachmas. That's a staggering 10 million dollars in today's economy. This was costly repentance but it was necessary to break the hold that it had on them.

Sometimes this is why we fail at overcoming sin—because our repentance costs us nothing and we maintain a degree of secrecy. We may repent. We may feel badly. We may tell God that we are sorry so why does the power still pull at us so strongly? Could it be because we have not confessed it? We have not gotten it out into the open. That's why James tells us to "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." The Roman Catholic church has taken this

teaching and turned it into a ritual. Sin can only be confessed to a priest in a place called a confessional. You know what a confessional is? It's any place you are sitting with another believer and pouring out your heart to them. Confession happens at the coffee shop, in the church lobby, in a Bible study or wherever Christians gather and the Holy Spirit is present.

Now there's no requirement to always confess all of your sins to another believer. We should not turn this into a legalistic thing but if you never confess your sins to someone it's too easy to keep it hidden. Yes, God knows. You may have told him and that's great but sometimes you need to confess your sins to one another. Don't keep it secret. Don't let it lay there in the darkness but instead expose it to the light.

They feared the Lord. They believed in Jesus. They confessed their sins to one another. And their repentance was costly. Last Sunday I told you that awful story about the pastor and conference speaker who preyed on women. Don Green told me a similar story about a pastor who finally got caught in his sin. They asked him why he never confessed his sin and he said "because I knew you would fire me." Uh, duh. Of course they're gonna fire you! Sin is costly and repentance must also be costly.

Consequences. Jesus paid for the penalty of your sin but we have to pay for the consequences. We can't do his part and he can't do our part. You may want to put off the old self. You may want to confess and repent of your sin but you're just plain too afraid of the consequences. You're not willing to pay the cost. You want freedom from the bondage to sin but you don't want any consequences. It doesn't have to be huge consequences. Maybe the consequence is as simple as someone being angry or disappointed with you. We'd rather lie and not confess rather than have someone think less of us. Such is the power of the opinions of other people. When this happens, even to a small degree, it's like you have one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God. You experience the worst of both worlds and the best of neither and you're miserable.

When I preached through Genesis one of the sermons was titled What is Repentance? Joseph led his brothers through an extremely difficult months-long journey toward repentance. During all of the back and forth between Egypt and Judah, Joseph was testing his brothers to see what they were made of, to see if they felt any remorse. Ultimately, what he was doing was leading them toward repentance. He knew that if he had immediately revealed his true identity, they would never have had a genuine conversation. Joseph was second in command of all of Egypt and would have held the lives of all of the brothers in the palm of his hand. What do you think would have happened if Joseph had asked if they were sorry for what they had done to him? Of course they would have said they were sorry, just to save their own necks. Even if there was something genuine in that, Joseph would have never known for sure.

Sorrow by itself is never enough, is it? If you make your daughter apologize to her sister for being mean and not sharing her toys, what will that get you? It will get you a forced apology and no heart change. The same would have been true had Joseph not led his brothers toward repentance instead of demanding an apology.

Anyone can be sorry. Judas was sorry. He had what Paul calls “worldly sorrow” and as a result, did not seek to be pardoned for betraying Jesus. Peter also denied Jesus but he had “godly sorrow” which led him to seek to be pardoned and resulted in genuine repentance.

Judas’ Repentance	Genuine Repentance
Recognition of sin	Recognition of sin
Sorrow	Sorrow
Not seeking to be pardoned	Seeking to be pardoned

The other vital piece of putting off the old self is to know that what you will ultimately receive is forgiveness and mercy. This comes down to our view of God. Is he a God of mercy who is standing by until we finally truly repent or is waiting in delight to crush us at the first sign of weakness? This is why the middle step is so important.

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

First, you put off your old self, but look what follows on the heels of that step—*and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds*. I call it the second step but I think that unnaturally separates this teaching. It almost looks like this:

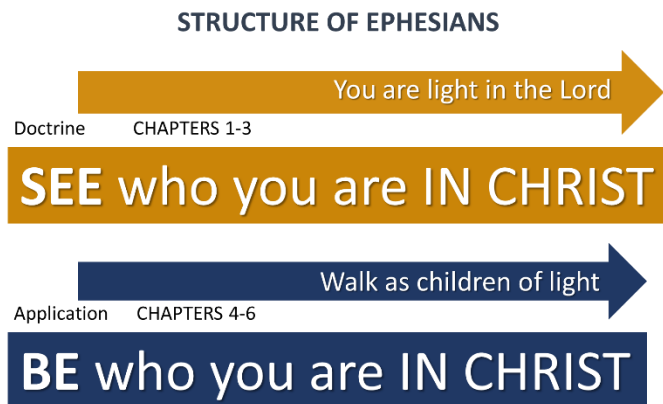
- Step One—put off the old self
- Step Two—renew your minds
- Step Three—put on the new self

But I don’t think it is intended to be like a recipe. If you’re following a recipe or building a house, there are certain steps that must be done in the correct order or the project will be a failure. Obviously it makes sense that you put off the old self before you put on the new self but the renewal of your mind is something that you are to be immersed in throughout the process. Before and after you put off the old self your mind is being renewed and as you out on the new self all the while your mind is being renewed.

So what is renewing your mind? What does that look like? Renewing your mind is simply aligning your thinking with God’s thinking. It’s as simple as that. There is so much heresy and heartache that would cease if we would only know and believe what God says. I stumbled upon a blog post this week which gave five reasons why this person did not believe in eternal conscious punishment of the unbeliever. Apparently, he has fifteen reasons but for the sake of brevity, only listed five of them. I’m all for a good theological debate but here’s what he did. He listed every Scripture he could think of except ones that relate to the eternal conscious punishment of the unbeliever. He said it could not be true for this reason and that reason and that reason but never dealt with the key Scriptures that teach it so clearly.

I am always amazed at how sloppy Christians are with using the Bible. It is taken out of context all of the time and twisted to make it say what they want it to say. And this is from Christians! So my point is that to renew your mind is thinking what God thinks not what you think he thinks. Do you follow? You can fill your mind with Scripture but that Scripture must be rightly divided. You could fill your mind with goofy and wrong interpretations of Scripture and you'll be worse off than when you started.

Of course I can't think of a better place to renew your minds with the book of Ephesians. I'm quite sure Paul would have agreed since the first three chapters were written to do just that very thing.



I hope you're not getting tired of this diagram because I believe it is a key to understanding Ephesians. And it is the key to renewing your minds. First, we must see who we are in Christ so that we can be who we are in Christ. Let me give you a concrete example.

Ephesians 5:8 says, *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk*

as children of light. The first part is God's part. You were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. You did not do that. He transferred you from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. That is who you are in Christ. Notice that it does not say that you lived in darkness or walked in darkness. You were darkness. It is who we were without Christ. It was not just a place we were in, it was our identity. But now we are light in the Lord. Not that we are in the light we are light in the Lord. It is your identity in Christ.

And because that is true, we are told that we should walk as children of light. How do you get from being light in the Lord to walking as children of light? You get there through putting off the old self and putting on the new self as you renew your mind. You can't really separate all of those as they all hang together.

Let's say you struggle with feeling that God is disappointed in you, that you don't measure up. You would be likely to sing the first stanza of Lauren Daigle's song, *How Can It Be?*

I am guilty
Ashamed of what I've done, what I've become
These hands are dirty
I dare not lift them up to the Holy one

Can you relate? Have you felt this way? Some of you are thinking, yes, every moment of every day. That's me. Others just feel it on occasion. Now if you feel this way it's going to be very hard to live as children of light. You feel like you don't measure up so you fall into the performance trap. You work harder so you can feel more accepted. This might look like walking

in the light but it's working hard for the wrong reasons. It's trying to earn God's favor. It's weighing out your good works on a long table, picking them up, examining them, adding them all together in a vain attempt to feel better. That's not walking in the light. Or maybe you just give up. You quit trying. You feel like you'll never measure up so why even try?

Do you see—both of those responses begin with walking. They begin with what you are doing instead of starting with what God has already done. You were darkness and now you are light in the Lord. You've got to let that roll around in your heart and mind. Memorize it. Post it on your bathroom mirror. Somehow, some way, you've got to get this truth drilled down deep into your soul. Your mind has to be renewed. You have to align your thinking with God's thinking.

Here's a thought for you. Read the first 3 chapters of Ephesians twice this week, one chapter per day. Chapter one tomorrow, 2 on Tuesday, 4 on Wednesday and then repeat. Of course it doesn't have to be Ephesians, it's just so relevant to renewing your mind according to what Paul means.

Once your thinking is aligned with God's thinking, once your mind is starting to be renewed, then you will realize that both the person who works hard for God's approval and the person who gives up trying are not thinking Biblically. You will begin to replace your feelings of rejection with feelings of acceptance. God has already accepted you through the blood of Christ, you just need to believe it and apply it to the lies that you believe about God. You will put off your old self. You will put off the lies of perfectionism and worthlessness. You will repent of your disbelief. You will repent of the ways you may have treated others due to your sense of worthlessness. Then you will put on the garments of God's truth and the identity of your redeemed self. You were darkness. You can take off that old self because of what Christ has done. But now you are light in the Lord. You can now put on the new self which *was created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. Slowly, over time, if you continue to repeat this process of putting off, putting on and renewing your mind, you will think differently, you will feel different and you will behave differently. You will become to be who you already are in Christ. You will begin to overcome the inertia of all that has held you back. God has done the work for you but you have to do the hard work of making this happen. The verse of Daigle's same song will begin to resonate in your heart and mind.

You plead my cause
You right my wrongs
You break my chains
You overcome
You gave Your life
To give me mine
You say that I am free
How can it be
How can it be¹

Rich Maurer
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¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wt5X91ciE6Y>

¹ <http://www.padfield.com/2000/ephesus.html>