

**Ephesians 4:17–24** “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. [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.” (ESV)

### **In Christ our lives are remade to look like His.**

Have you ever been shopping at Target while wearing a red shirt? Or, more likely, have you ever mistaken a person in a red shirt for a Target employee?!

Why does that happen? Well, it’s their uniform... and typically a uniform makes clear who someone is.

It’s helpful. (Aprons for CM) Makes things clear.

And though we live in an increasingly anti-uniform age, we get the reality of their good.

Yes it is embarrassing when we get it wrong because we’ve confused something of identity...

Did you know that Christians have a uniform? Metaphorically - we look a certain way - we put on what accords to our identity so as to not be confused for what we once were.

### **In Christ our lives are remade to look like His.**

Paul in this letter to the church has given sweeping theology; salvation through faith, a kingdom under Christ who reigns over all things, Oneness, unity, belonging in the church.

From the enabling grace of Christ and corporate spiritual maturity in the church he continues to move into the practical outworking of our faith-rooted or saturated lives.

**Ephesians 4:1** “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” (ESV)

This is walking and it looks different.

In sensible communities, it is appropriate to be dressed before you go on walking.

Paul is starting not merely with behavior, something deeper. Self, a new humanity.

Behavior follows identity. Paul is giving a reminder to the church to stay clothed in newness of life. And in doing so he contrasts the former manner of life with a life of truth.

I know in a text like this we can be prone to read performance into the call, but notice this is not “bah your way to a new self” but be the self Christ has made you.

All anchored in the exhortation to put off the old and put on the new.

“Put off and put on are in a Greek tense called the aorist. We don’t have a tense like that. Not only do we not have it in English, but we hardly have it anywhere else either. It refers to a single past finished action. What Paul is actually telling them is he’s reminding them they have put off the old self and they have put on. Even though obviously you can tell put off means put off the old way of life and put on the new way of life, yet Paul is talking about a single past action. Something has already happened. They’ve already done it, and he’s reminding them they have already done it.”

It is with this sense that Paul encourages the church.

### **1. Life apart from Christ is futile.**

I am a Star Trek fan and futile is an important word when it comes to the Borg...” resistance is futile.” It’s pointless, worthless, doesn’t make sense.

Paul is pointing out that a life alienate from the life of God is pointless, foolishness.

So when we say a life apart from Christ is futile we generally believe it. After all we sacrifice time to come together, sing songs, hear Scripture and be exhorted to trust Jesus and live the life of God!

But likely it wasn't always that way for us... maintaining this belief. There is a lot of disagreement about what is the best way to live and the church consistently calls its members to live differently than the prevailing way.

Paul implores these saints to no longer walk in the old way, "as Gentiles do..." Fascinating phrase, because these are Gentile believers. But their lives have changed.

"One of the greatest things about Christianity is Christianity gives you the resources to change who you are."

When they didn't know better though it was a different story. Maybe some of us are in this life and we don't have a clue of the danger written about here. We are just going with "feels right."

The former way has a futility of mind. Baked into the human experience...

**Ecclesiastes 1:2-9** "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea. Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new." (NLT)

Deeper still than humanity, all of creation.

**Romans 8:20-21** "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (ESV)

Absolutely right, life as vapor, without meaning apart from God... just the universe experiencing itself.

The challenge though is when we are in it, we can't see beyond it because we are "darkened in our understanding." Clouded by lies of self over all, of pleasure as the pathway... we stumble along unfulfilled, never satisfied.

The danger comes as image-bearers of God are alienated from him because of ignorance due to “hardness of heart.” A rigidity against God. F. F. Bruce defines the hardening of Gentile hearts as “the progressive inability of conscience to convict them of wrongdoing.”

**Romans 1:18–25** “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (ESV)

Lead to fruitless places.

We become callous, numb to reality and we end up running after things that only bring death. Sensuality, greed, impurity.

Glaring clarity on this in a conversation Bill Maher was having on abortion. He understood the pro-life perspective but doesn't agree with it. “They think it's murder, and it kind of is. I'm just okay with that. I am. There [are] 8 billion people in the world, I'm sorry, we won't miss you. That's my position on that.”

Self above all. Corrupt through deceitful desires. Redefine humanity to match my whim. Recategorize relationships to give me cover for my impulse. Taking more than I need or deserve at the hair of others.

None of these things fulfill you. Momentary hits of dopamine but the life you ache for is just out of reach.

Life alienated from the life of God.

When you are in it you don't always see it - but Paul trusts that we as believers have seen it, that we've recognized the futility and been awakened to life with God.

“When you begin to see your life without God is actually a life without real hope and without real control, now you're starting to get ready to say, “I don't want that life anymore.” Timothy J. Keller

Maybe the Spirit of God will use this morning to shed light on the difference.

Paul says to avoid the life of the rear-view mirror. “Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life.” It is not who you are anymore in Christ.

When you have faith in Jesus for salvation and life you get new clothes, a new humanity. And if he doesn't cloth you life remain futile.

The kingdom is like a king who throws a wedding feast...

**Matthew 22:11–14** “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. [12] And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. [13] Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ [14] For many are called, but few are chosen.” (ESV)

Put off the old self, and put on the new.

There is a story about Augustine revisiting a city he once lived in after his conversion. Augustine lived the playboy life, prostitutes and paramours the plenty. But that was the manner of his old life.

As he walk through the city an old mistress of his (maybe even the one who mothered his child) was making verbal advances on him, hoping to relive the “glory days.” Frustrated that he wasn't picking up here signals she finally yelled at him, “Augustine, it is I...” To which Augustine responded, “Yes, but it is no longer I.”

**2. Life with Christ is fruitful.**

The old life was futile... **Ephesians 4:20–21** “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,” (ESV)

A manner of living that entices you backward and gives permission for it, that is not the way of truth. In contrast to the Gentiles’ pattern of thinking and living, believers have been instructed in accordance with the truth, which can be found only in Jesus.

We hear this phrase in our day, “live your truth.” Which in the wind means live whatever you like. But for the believer, here your truth is meant to be Jesus.

Jesus answers the questions that Ecclesiastes raises, life isn’t meaningless, the life of God is actually good, to be enjoyed and to be forever!

The Christian then constantly puts on the “clothing of Christ.” Not merely new morals, Christianity is not ultimately becoming more moral, but becoming new, being the new humanity Jesus inaugurates.

“He’s not talking about putting on and putting off behaviors. He’s talking about a whole new self. Becoming a Christian is being something before it’s doing something. It’s a comprehensive inner change, not just to how you live, but to who you are now.”

Getting dressed here is continuing to learn Jesus and seeing him as the truth that we are living.

The idea of learning Christ “means welcoming him as a living person and being shaped by his teaching,” with the result of “submitting to his rule of righteousness and responding to his summons to standards and values completely different from what they have known.”

F.F. Bruce says, “Christ himself is the Christian’s teacher, even if the teaching is given through the lips of his followers; to receive the teaching is in the truest sense to hear him.” Jesus’ sheep hear his voice (John 10:16). When true preaching takes place, Jesus is invisibly in the pulpit and walking the aisles personally teaching his own.

Where renewal is found. “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds...”

Paul literally says, “In the spirit of your minds, be made new. Be renewed.” It’s a present progressive, something you have to be doing all the time... not thinking a

certain way but He's talking about the very direction of your thinking, the theme of your thinking, the heart of your thinking.

We stack the wood and let the Spirit bring the fire.

To put on the new self, our new identity, righteousness, holiness, as we are created after the likeness of God.

**Colossians 3:12–17** “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (ESV)

Flashes back to spiritual maturity, being made like Jesus.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: “There is but one garment of salvation, namely, Christ. Hence the “new man” created in God’s likeness is none other than Christ. One who has put on Christ has thus put on the new person created in God’s likeness.”

This is not unlike when I took my wedding vows. At the moment I said “I do” I was married, it was fully my identity, but since that moment I have continued learning to be married... to keep putting on this reality.

“Scripture and experience teach us that no one has ever succeeded in shedding the garments of the old life with a solitary, unrepeated action. Those who live holy lives do so by repeated putting offs. The problem is, the old garments are so comfortable and natural. Not only that, many of us have worn them so long that they naturally drape over us and we scarcely know we are wearing them until the Holy Spirit reproves us. If you are fighting lust, it must daily be shed. This is equally true of pride and bitterness and covetousness and all their relatives. Many Christians stumble because they don’t realize this. But the truth is, our sins will have to be put off daily as long as we live.”

Kent Hughes

Daily death like this is worth it because of what we put on instead.

Forgiveness, life, purpose, eternity with our king. Secure, mature, seeing it all as eternally valuable rooted in the truth of Jesus as we live into our freedom. Made new.

Morals come, satisfaction comes. We get there by being enamored with Jesus. Truth underlying this text is that we start to look like our obsession. And when it's Jesus, it's good. When he is our truth, we rejoice when he calls us to life.

“The New Testament is clear: no one is barred from Jesus’s kingdom on the basis of something they cannot change—whether by being born a Gentile or by their age, sex, race, or sexual history. The invitation to repent and put our trust in Jesus is an invitation to all humans... But when we put our trust in Jesus, we receive him as Lord. Jesus has the right to tell us when our hearts’ desires are sinful (Mark 7:20–23). He has the right to tell us to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23). He has the right to tell us what to do with our bodies. Why? Because he bought us with his precious blood (1 Cor. 6:19–20).”

Rebecca McLaughlin

Jesus is the subject, teacher, and atmosphere. This is the Christian experience, as St. Patrick so beautifully put it in the fifth century:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,

Christ behind me, Christ before me,

Christ beside me, Christ to win me,

Christ to comfort and restore me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love me,

Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.



**In Christ our lives are remade to look like his.**

*Help each other* - make Jesus amazing to one another. Help each other catch his fragrance, his truth.

*Put on the new self* - Commit to life with God, being renewed, saturated in the good news of the gospel, the empowerment of the Spirit, and live.

It seems a little cheesy looking back on it, but in grad school I worked as a security guard and I was reminded this week of the feeling of completing training and getting the uniform... Accomplish, purposeful, identity.

In Christ you have new clothes, a Christian uniform, wear them well for his glory and your good.