

## **Becoming New People, Part 1**

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Eph. 4:17-24

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Last Sunday, I had the opportunity to co-officiate in the baptism of my granddaughter and grand-nephew in the Catholic Church in Dana Point. I, myself, was baptized in the Catholic Church as an infant, went to Catholic school through the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and was married in a Catholic Church in Pasadena. So, it was an amazing experience to be standing next a catholic priest—he in his Catholic priestly robe and I, in my Presbyterian robe.

I felt like my role there was to be a peacemaker, to bring unity to this baptism. So, I opened the service by reading Ephesians 4:4-5, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

To faithfully bring this unity, I spent some time comparing the Catholic view and wording of baptism with our Presbyterian Book of Order. The priest was very open for me to do almost all of the service, except for the actual words of Baptism, but he was a little apologetic about that—he definitely wanted my hands on the babies while he pronounced the words of baptism. Right after the babies were baptized, it was my responsibility to talk about the symbolisms in the Catholic service of baptism. The one that is relevant here is the symbolism of wearing white- It is not mandatory, but both of these babies had on white, interestingly, one dress was over 100 years old. **White** symbolizes an outward sign of being clothed in Christ, Jesus, a putting on of the fresh garments that are His. White represents God’s faithfulness, his purity, his righteousness and his holiness.

It is not my intent in this sermon to expound on baptism and all the meaning and significance of this sacrament, but I loved the symbolism of white; the deliberate act of being clothed in the fresh garment of Christ. For these babies, the sacrament of baptism is only a start in the Christian life. It is a promise of the family and loved ones to take on the responsibility of raising these children in the love and admonition of our Lord Jesus Christ. As God embraced these babies and said “yes” to them before they were formed, it is our prayer that each of them will say “yes” to Him.

For us today, as the babies symbolically “are clothed” in the garments of Christ, we too, are to be clothed with a new self, “created according to the likeness of God

in true righteousness and holiness.” But, what does this look like and how do we do it?

**Let us pray before we begin to look at the scripture for today.**

Keep your Bibles open as you will want to follow along.

**In the opening verses of the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ephesians**, Paul has been dealing with the nature of the church and the role each Christian has to play in its operation and its growth, in keeping the unity of the body of Christ, not letting Baptism, for example, be a source of division. Now, **verse 17**, Paul addresses the **Christian’s relationship to an unbelieving world**, a world in which the Christians must live in. So, this is for us today, for those of us who are believers of our Lord, Jesus Christ, living in a world of unbelievers. Shouldn’t there be a difference in our lifestyles, in our values, in how we relate to one another each day, and how we spend our time?

**Verse 17** starts off with the words, “Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord,” which means, pay close attention to this. This is not just a suggestion . In very strong terms, Paul is making a very solemn declaration; that the Christians in Ephesus must no longer live as Gentiles. The Christians must not longer live as unbelievers, as heathens.

We need to remember that Paul is writing to the church that he founded on his 2nd Missionary journey. In his day, Ephesus was the center of commerce and a melting pot of nations and ethnic group. Ephesus played a role similar to the city of Venice in the Middle Ages, or Istanbul today. It had the largest open-air amphitheater that seated about 25,000 people. There was stadium for chariot races and in the center of the town was a great temple to Diana or Artemis—considered to be one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It is about 4 times the size of the Parthenon.

The Ephesians, being Greek in their world view, prided themselves with their knowledge and intellect. A central principle was that the best, noblest, and ultimately most worthwhile part of the human being is the intellect. Now, do you see the similarities between the prosperity in a melting pot of ethnic groups, and value of the intellect of Ephesus and South Orange County today, with our affluence—buildings, houses, food, jobs, material acquisitions and importance on free thinking, education and achievement, success on all levels.

Paul is telling the Christians of Ephesus, and all Christians, including us here in this room, that we “must no longer live as the unbelieving world. Paul is saying that the place to start in living as a Christian is to recognize that we must think differently than the world does. He uses the words, “futility of their minds,” “Darkened in their understanding,” and alienated from the life of God.”

**Futility**, in Greek, means “void of purpose or appropriateness.” JB Philips, in his modern paraphrase puts it this way, “Do not live as the gentiles live. For they live blindfolded in a world of illusions.” Futility is not to be mistaken for stupidity, but with the failure to produce anything lasting or of eternal value.

**Next, Paul uses the term, “Darkened in their understanding.”** Scripture continually uses the terms, light and darkness, as metaphors for truth and ignorance. Truth is light; ignorance is darkness. When Paul writes, **Darkened in their understanding**, he is declaring that people’s thinking is shadowed with ignorance. We can all identify with this as we think we know so much, and, yes, we do. We know so much, but we never know quite enough. We can never know all of it. This darkness also comes from hardened hearts. People who are so set in their own understanding that they are not opened to hearing the truth, or to change their thinking in any way. **They are set in their incorrect and inadequate understanding. That is what the apostle is addressing.**

This next step is inevitable. On their own, with futility of mind, and darkened in understanding, it is natural that they are **“Alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance and hardness of heart”**—in other words, they are excluded from the life of God. Paul is not blaming the unbelievers for this; he is simply analyzing a situation that exists. Because their understanding is darkened, shadowed, incomplete, ignorant, the unbelievers reject the life of God.

From **V. 19**, unbelievers have lost all sensitivity and even abandoned their own standards of living. Anything goes—I want what I want no matter what. What about me and my right? Again doesn’t this sound like our society today? Just look at all the problems and scandals in the sports this week; there is hardly a sport that was without some scandal, getting ahead no matter what the cost.

Fortunately, Paul doesn’t leave us here in this darkness. **V. 20**, says, “This is not the way you learned Christ! This is not what Jesus taught. J.B. Philips says, “You have learned nothing like that from Christ.”

Jesus is the great divide, not only in a historical sense, with the date change from BC to AD, but He is also a personal dividing point for everyone who has been saved by him. Our culture has gone through many different futile efforts of self discovery, to achieve “enlightenment”—EST, Mind Dynamics, and Scientology to name a few. **But, the only truly, transforming power that has ever come into the world is that of the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, and the only true and lasting changes that ever take place in an individual life, take place through believing in and learning from him.** Jesus is the great divide, not only historically but also in the lives of people, through the ages.

So what is this for us today, especially now that we can identify with Ephesus. Paul is very emphatic, here. The believers of Ephesus and us today, are to do **3** things in **V. 23-24. We are to**

**1. Put away our former way of life—corrupt and deluded by its lusts.**

Put away, or put off means getting rid of something, to take it off. Paul is using this illustration of putting off in the realm of thought, of the attitudes of life. We must reject, put away, put off those thoughts and attitudes that are futile, darkened in understanding, and alienated from the life of God; reject them, get rid of them. Paul says that the former way of life is corrupt by “lusts”. This word is greatly misunderstood today. We often times think of **lust** as sexual desires, but it is much more than that. It means **any urge or basic drive**. The urge to spend money, the urge to use others for our own advantage; the urge to manipulate others; the urge to nag others; the urge to lie or cheat to get what we want; the urge to criticize what we do not understand; the urge to be impatient with other, or irritated by them; and the holier-than-thou urge which makes us feel righteous, better, cleaner, more respectable than someone else.

**1. We are to “Put away our former way of life”**—put off the futility of our minds. But how do we do this? The only way this can be done, the only way we can put off or put away our old self is,

**2. We are “To be renewed in the spirit of our minds”**—This is only possible by the indwelling of the Spirit of God—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledge the presences of the Holy Spirit and allow him to renewal of our minds. The Holy Spirit reverses the darkened understanding with renewal that is ongoing, continuous, and progressive.

**3. We are “To clothe ourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”** which of course makes our relationship with God right. Clothing ourselves or “putting on” is not something temporary, but it is a genuineness of heart, true righteousness, right behavior that is purposeful. A more accurate translation for the word, *holiness*, is *wholeness*. It means becoming the person God intended us to be: created in his likeness, in righteousness and wholeness.

So, putting off: the old, the futility, the darkened understanding, the alienation from God. Be renewed by the Holy Spirit, and then **put on** new garments of the righteousness of God.

**So let’s put this in very basic terms.**

**Non-Christian:** futile thinking, darkened in understanding, and alienation from God; controlled by urges, alone, without help

**A Christian:** new self, created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness or wholeness. And we are not alone in this; the spirit of God is working

to renew our minds, **resulting in a wonderful relationship with Almighty God, creator of all.**

**Put off—Put on** When it is put this way, it is hard for me to understand why we, as believers, have such a hard time doing what is right.

But it happened to me as I was preparing this sermon. A situation came up which left me in a very dark place of negativity. I had to put the lesson of this sermon into practice even before I was finished writing it. God, has not only given us his Holy Spirit, and He provided the armor that Jeff preached on last week. One piece of armor is the sword, the Word of God, and that is what God provided for me in my darkness. He encouraged and empowered me to make a deliberate decision to put on the garments of Jesus, with the wonderful uplifting words of **Phil 4:8**

**“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”**

We still feel these urges, but we can put them off, because of what Jesus did on the cross. He put on himself our darkened self; he put on our sin, our urges and took them to the cross. Earlier in this service we had a time of confession, a time putting off our old self and asking for forgiveness. As you come to communion today, come taking off your old self, your darkened understanding, your old urges, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, visualize yourself as one of those precious babies, dressed in their pure white garments. You come to Jesus, your new self wearing His garments, knowing you are created in the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness.