

## PUT AWAY THE OLD AND PUT ON THE NEW

*4* <sup>17</sup>Therefore, this is what I tell you, and solemnly urge you by the Lord, [namely,] that you must no longer walk like the Gentiles who walk in the futility of their mind. <sup>18</sup>They are darkened in their understanding; they are separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with the lust for more. <sup>20</sup>But this is not what you learned [from] Christ; <sup>21</sup>if indeed you heard him and were taught by him. Since truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup>[I exhort you,] with regard to your former way of life, to get rid of the old “person” who was corrupted by the deceitful passions. <sup>23</sup>And being renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup>put on the new “person” that has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. 4:17-24)

### **Introduction**

Picture yourself being lost in the wilds of Africa.

By day you wander across the dry and dusty plains; you hack your way through thick underbrush; and you wade across streams, through mud, and over rocky terrain. By night you sleep on the ground, exposed to the elements.

Now imagine what all this does to your clothes! They become faded by the sun, shredded by the underbrush, caked with mud, and wrinkled from sleeping in them every night. Your clothes look awful, they smell even worse, and they are absolutely filthy!

After weeks spent wandering around in such a condition, you are finally rescued by a search party and brought back to civilization. A tub of hot soapy water is provided for you and you take a long refreshing bath. You emerge from the tub zestfully clean; you dry yourself off; and reach for those filthy old clothes. But wait a minute! Do you really want to go back to wearing those same old tattered clothes? Wouldn't you rather put on the beautiful new clothing that has been so graciously provided for you? If not for yourself personally, it sure would make everyone else happy if you exchanged those old tattered dirty rags for a new outfit.

This is what Ephesians 4:17-24 is all about: now that you have come to Christ, do not continue to go around wearing the filthy old “clothes” of your old sinful lifestyle, put on the beautiful new “clothes” of the new life of righteousness and holiness provided by God! As Christians, we are to give up the lifestyle and the actions that are morally filthy and spiritually unclean; and we are to replace all those things with actions and lifestyle that are morally pure and spiritually wholesome. Ephesians 4:25-5:14 will become specific (dealing with integrity, anger, sexual conduct.) Ephesians 4:17-24 begins by laying the foundation, explaining the why and the how of this transformation.

Because we have become members of the family of God, we may no longer live like the world; on the contrary, we must put away the old and put on the new.

### **I. Put Away the Old and Put on the New, ...in order to be Like Christ (4:19-21)**

In verse 19 the Apostle Paul describes the lifestyle of the world in the following terms. He begins by saying that they give themselves up to *“sensuality”* (or, wantonness.) They throw off all moral restraint and indulge their every passion; note the Apostle Peter’s description, writing to Christians, he says, *“They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation”* (1 Pet. 4:4.) By way of illustration, they release their sail to the wind and allow themselves to be swept up and carried away by every wind of passion.

Paul goes on to say, they practice every form of *“impurity with the lust for more.”* They indulge in that which is unholy and impure, experiencing an ever stronger and more perverse lust for deeper forms of depravity:

*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another ...<sup>26</sup> ... God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.<sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were enflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Rom. 1:24,26-27)*

Writing to the church at Rome, Paul exhorts them to no longer live the sinful and decadent lifestyle that was characteristic of them prior to their conversion to Christ: *“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in service to righteousness leading to holiness ...<sup>21</sup>What benefit did you reap at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? Those things result in death”* (Rom. 6:19b, 21.)

Verse 22 describes the lifestyle of the world as being *“corrupted by the deceitful passions.”* Here is described a lifestyle that is morally and spiritually rotting away as *“the deceitful passions”* operate upon it like a cancer. *“The deceitful passions”* are those unholy expressions of passion that promise satisfaction and fulfillment, but instead lead to destruction: sexual immorality, various forms of addiction to drugs or alcohol, materialism (the lust to possess more and more things, and becoming possessed by that desire.) The Apostle James warns: *“each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.<sup>15</sup>Then, after the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my dear brothers”* (Jas. 1:14-16.)

Having given a description of the lifestyle of the world, the apostle declares, *“this is not what you learned from Christ”* (vs. 20.) That is to say, as you studied Christ,

you did not see this lifestyle of perversity and despair that you see in the world around you. On the contrary, what you saw in Christ was a life of fellowship with God based upon a life of holiness unto God. Our Lord Jesus testified, *“The one who sent me is with me, he has not forsaken me; because I always do the things that are pleasing to him”* (Jn. 8:29.) Again, speaking to His heavenly Father, He testified, *“I glorified you on the earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do”* (Jn. 17:4.) Christ has brought us into His fellowship and into His life in order to make us like Himself: *“our Savior Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to himself a people for his own possession, [a people who are] zealous to do good works”* (Titus 2:14.)

As Christians, we are commanded to put off the old and put on the new, in order to become like Christ our Savior.

## **II. Put Away the Old and Put on the New, ...because You Possess the Truth (4:17-21)**

What does truth (the absolute standard of divine truth) have to do with righteous living? The answer: It has **everything** to do with righteous living! Divine truth is the foundation for righteous conduct; it gives instruction in righteous living and it gives incentive for righteous living (both promising reward as well as warning of judgment.) The perverse lifestyle of the world can be traced back to their rejection of and their separation from the truth of God, note Romans 1:28, *“since they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which ought not to be done.”*

The people of the world are described as walking in *“the futility of their mind”* (vs. 17.) Their life is ultimately one of purposelessness and meaninglessness. They do not know from where they came, to where they are going, or why they are here; there is restlessness of heart and suppressed guilt. At a commencement ceremony, the valedictorian of Harvard University, in all honesty and with all earnestness, addressed the audience with the question, “Can anyone out there tell me why I am here?” All this is in striking contrast to the knowledge possessed by the child of God in Christ, as expressed by the Apostle Paul earlier in this very epistle. In Ephesians 1:7-10 he informs us of the purpose of God, which He has graciously made known to His children in Christ:

*... by whom we have redemption through his blood, [namely,] the forgiveness of our transgressions. By the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us with all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup>he has made known to us the mystery of his will, which originates from his own desire and which he determined by himself. <sup>10</sup>[This mystery pertains] to the final dispensation, [namely, his determination] to unite all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. (Eph. 1:7-10)*

What accounts for the world's present state of purposelessness and futility? The answer is now given, namely, the fact that they have become *"darkened in their understanding."* The Greek term translated, *"understanding"* (διάνοια), is referring to the reasoning capability; it literally means, "to think through something;" it is the process of reasoning. The Gentile world—the world apart from Christ—has a mind that is functioning in the dark— they have become *"darkened in their understanding,"* they are carrying out the process of reasoning in the dark. By way of illustration: They are trying to assemble a great jigsaw puzzle—the "puzzle" that reveals the answers to life—in the dark!

Why is their understanding darkened? Such is the case because they are *"separated (or, alienated) from the life of God."* The Greek term translated, *"separated"* (ἀπαλλοτριόω), means, "to have no connection with;" they have no true living connection with the God of heaven. The Psalmist testifies that with God is the light that illuminates the meaning of life: *"with you is the fountain of life; in your light shall we see light"* (Psalm 36:9.) The Apostle John testifies that the Lord Jesus Christ is both the Source of life as well as the Revelation of the meaning of life, *"In him was life; and the Life was the light of men"* (Jon. 1:4.) But he goes on to declare, *"The true Light, [the Light] that enlightens every man, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, but the world did not know him"* (Jn. 1:9-10.) Here, the verb *"to know"* has the meaning, "to recognize, accept, embrace," to have affinity with someone or something.

Why is the world alienated from the life of God? The answer, *"because of the ignorance that is in them."* When it comes to an understanding of the true and living God, all men outside of Christ and apart from Him are "agnostics." That is to say, they are *"without knowledge"* (ἄγνοια), they have no personal acquaintance with the God of heaven, note Acts 17:22-23, a passage that reports Paul's ministry in Athens:

*Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup>As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23)*

Why is there this ignorance of the living God? The answer, because of the *"hardness (πώρωσις) of their heart."* The men of the world are literally suffering from "paralysis (πώρωσις) of the heart;" their heart is spiritually comparable to petrified wood! Within the heart of the natural man there is a deep-seated enmity against God: *"the sinful mind [the mind of the natural man in his state of sinfulness] is at enmity against God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"* (Rom. 8:7.) As Paul testifies in the Book of Romans, mankind, inheriting their sinful disposition from their forefather Adam, *"exchanged the truth of God for the*

*lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen ... they refused to have God in their knowledge"* (Rom. 1:25,28a.) By way of illustration: Instead of seeking to assemble "the puzzle of life" in the light provided by God, men in their sinfulness and guilt "pull down the shade" and insist on working in the dark, even though it is absolutely futile to do so. The reason they chose to do so is further revealed by the Apostle John:

*... this is [the reason for] the condemnation: the Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light; because their works were evil.<sup>20</sup> Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed. (Jn. 3:19-20)*

Paul further describes the men of the world as having become callous—they have *"lost all sensitivity"* (vs. 19.) There comes a time when a man or a society may move beyond the point of being spiritually ignorant to becoming spiritually callous: then the conscience becomes so de-sensitized that it can no longer exert a restraining influence on the conduct and can no longer provide conviction that may lead to repentance. When that spiritual point is reached and that line is crossed, and the man or the society passes over to the state of callousness, the lifestyle described in verse 19 becomes rampant and dominant: *"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with the lust for more."*

In contrast to the state of the world (especially as it existed in the Roman empire of the first century,) note the motivation the Apostle Paul uses to exhort us as Christians to righteous living:

*Since truth is in Jesus,<sup>22</sup> [I exhort] you, with regard to your former way of life, to get rid of the old "person" who was corrupted by the deceitful passions.<sup>23</sup> And being renewed in the spirit of your mind,<sup>24</sup> put on the new "person." (Eph. 4:21b-24a.)*

Because these Ephesian Christians have become exposed to the truth of God, as it is revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ and seen in Him, the apostle now on that basis exhorts them (and us) to live a life that is in accord with the truth. By way of illustration: We have been exposed to the divine "sunlight" of God's truth, now we must allow that "sunlight" to transform our "complexion"—our whole life and being. The Apostle Peter writes, *"[you should] not live the remainder of your earthly life for evil human desires, but for the will of God"* (1 Pet. 4:2.)

As Christians, we are commanded to put off the old and to put on the new, because we possess the truth of God. In Christ we are set free from the bondage of sin and are made free to live a life of holiness unto God: *"Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, If you remain in my word you will truly be my disciples;<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (Jn. 8:31-32.)

### III. Put Away the Old and Put on the New, ...by Renewing Your Mind (4:22-24)

The apostle's prayer and exhortation is that we be "*renewed in the spirit of your mind.*" "*The spirit of your mind*" refers to the governing principle of our thinking; that which determines our outlook, that which guides our thinking. To be "*renewed*" in the spirit of our mind means to consciously think about ourselves and our life in Christian terms rather than to think like the world. More specifically, it means to now view ourselves and our relationship to God and to the world in the light of the cross of Calvary: "*far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world*" (Gal. 6:14.)

As a Christian, you can take off and lay aside the old sinful conduct and lifestyle, because you were spiritually joined to Christ in His crucifixion. As we seek to state this great spiritual mystery, we may say, when you gave your sinful heart to Christ, He "took it back to Calvary," causing it to be united to Him in His crucifixion.

As a Christian, you can put on the new and live out a godly lifestyle, because you have been spiritually joined to Christ in His resurrection. When you gave your heart to Christ, He not only "took it back to Calvary" to be joined with Him in His crucifixion, He also carried it with Him into His resurrection, so that it now shares in His resurrection life.

As Christians, we are commanded to put off the old and put on the new, by the renewing of our mind, as Paul writes to the Christians at Rome:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-2)*

We are to be ever conscious of and remind ourselves of the new life we now share with Christ by virtue of His crucifixion and resurrection. We must ask Christ to apply His victory to our lives as we face the specific areas of transformation presented in the following verses of Ephesians 4 and 5, passages addressing specific behavior with regard to integrity, anger and sexual conduct.

### Conclusion

Picture yourself lost in the wilds of Africa: your clothes are faded, tattered, shredded, and filthy. Picture yourself rescued, brought back to civilization, and made zestfully clean. Can you picture yourself once again putting on those old filthy clothes? No! Instead, picture yourself putting on new, clean garments—the

garments of godliness and righteousness. Now put all this into practice by asking Christ your Savior to increasingly apply His victory to every part of your life.