

Ephesians 4:17-24

Week 8 - "Put off the Old + Put on the New"

5/9/21

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Happy Mother's Day! (address happy and sad of the day). **Ephesians 4:17-24. Pray.**

Bob. I want to start today by telling you about my hypothetical friend named Bob. Bob is 45 years old. He has a wife and two kids. He's a mid level manager at a local technology company.

Now a typical day for Bob looks something like this - He wakes up around 11, 11:30, maybe noon. Hangs out in bed for a few hours looking at TikTok. He goes to Taco Bell to get a \$5 box. After that he might head to the gym for a little bit. Kick it with the fellas. Around 6 or 6:30 he might send some emails just you know cause his boss told him he had to. Then he gets ready, heads out to the bars with some friends, is out till about midnight, 1 am. Comes back, plays some playstation till about 2:30 or 3. Heads to bed ready to wake up and do it all over again tomorrow.

Now - this is a big time hyperbolic scenario right? But any logical adult in the room would say there's a problem with Bob. **His life is not congruent with his roles.** He's a father. He's a husband. He's a manager. Those things are true. But his identities haven't shifted or reoriented his life. He's still living like an over stereotyped 18 year old college freshman.

There is a disconnect between his identity and how he actually lives his life.

What we're going to see today in Ephesians 4 is Paul addressing this very idea with our most fundamental and primary identity → **as followers of Jesus.**

If you put your faith in Jesus, if you turned from your sin and believed in Him, you have a new identity in Christ. Remember Chapter 1? You were chosen by the Father, saved by Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus in John 3 - **born again.** Paul in 2 Cor 5 - **new creations.**

The old has gone, and the new has come. And now, in Ephesians 4 Paul's encouragement to us is to **"Put off your old self...and put on the new self."**

Meaning → If you're a follower of Jesus your life should reflect what is already true about you. You **are** a new creation in Christ, so you should now live like it. **You must learn to become...what you already are.**

Passage Intro

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord,

The word Paul uses for "testify" here, could be translated as "protest". It's the strongest way he can possibly word something. He means business. He's coming direct and he's coming forcefully and bluntly. And then just in case that wasn't enough he tacks on → "In the Lord." In other words, this is me and God coming after y'all. I got a WORD.

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk [live] as the Gentiles do...

Now, he's not talking about Gentiles in regards to ethnicity here, but in regards to morality. He's setting up a distinction between followers of Christ and those who are not. And Paul says → **you must no longer walk...**

You used to live a certain way, you used to chase after these things, you used to order your life as if Christ wasn't your King and Savior, you used to be without hope and without God. But now Christ has entered in, you've been united to Him! So you should be different from those around you.

You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do...If Paul were writing this to us today he would say it like → **“You must no longer live as Charlotteans do. Your lives must no longer look like a typical North Carolinian or a typical American.”**

There's the way of life that everyone else around you is going to live, that you used to join in on, and there's a way of life you're now called to live as a follower of Jesus.

If you put your life up side by side with the life of someone who lives next door to you and does not know Jesus **they should look holistically different.**

The gospel should change everything - both big and small.

- Our budgets should be different.
- Our conversations and speech should be different.
- Our friendships and dating relationships should be different.
- Our parenting should be different.

Why? Because we are new creations in Christ Jesus. Part of our salvation is that the old has gone, the new has come...so now we **put off** our old way of thinking, our old way of loving, our old way of living. And we **put on** a new way of thinking, loving, and living in Christ Jesus.

And that's the three areas Paul's going to go after - our heads, our hearts, and our hands. How we think, what we love, and how we live.

In other words:

- **How we think should change because of the gospel.**
- **What we love should change because of the gospel.**
- **How we live should change because of the gospel.**

Let's break these down together. We'll start where Paul starts - with our heads. Our minds. How we think.

Our Heads

17 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,

	Old Self	New Self
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Darkened minds · Separated from the life of God 	
Heart		
Hands		

We just sang about it earlier in the Gathering - "I was in darkness all of my life, I never knew the day from the night...I swore I knew the way on my own, head full of rocks, a heart made of stone..."

Have you ever been in a pitch black room? I mean, dark dark. What do you do? Besides crying for help. You start feeling around. You start trying to grasp for things to make sense of the reality which you cannot see. Maybe this is a table, maybe this is a lamp. Ultimately it's pointless right? We're never going to understand what's actually around us.

Paul says that's our spiritual state apart from Christ. Our minds are darkened. And yet in our sinfulness and pride and self-sufficiency we start grasping around us trying to make sense of the world, making up ideas of how things should be, trying to write narratives of the world around us so we can make sense of it all.

Separated the whole time from the life of God. But there's a different invitation for us. Paul says to put on the new self. The new mind. The light of Christ has shone. We know Christ, who is the truth. Look at what Paul says down in verse 20:

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,

	Old Self	New Self
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Darkened minds · Separated from the life of God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Truth of Jesus · Renewed minds
Heart		
Hands		

You're not in a dark room anymore. You have been taught about Christ - who is The Truth, who is the Light of the World. You don't have to grasp around at straws and write narratives about the world around you.

But here's the deal → Paul says you have to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. This is an ongoing process. We must continually reject the old, darkened and clouded ways we used to think, we must reject the narratives of the world around us - and continue to renew our minds in the truth of Jesus.

The truth of Jesus and the lies of the world are completely antithetical to each other. The prevailing narratives in which our world seeks to live, and our old minds want to follow, don't mesh with the teachings of Jesus or with the writings of Scripture. Let me give you just a few ways your thinking should shift and be renewed by the Spirit, as opposed to what the world tells you to believe.

- The narrative of the world is that **many paths lead to God**. This is called **pluralism**. What's your truth is your truth, what's my truth is my truth, you can believe what you want and I'll believe what I want.. Jesus says something opposite - That He is **THE way, THE truth, and THE life**. That you don't get to God but through Him. **If you don't learn to renew your minds, put on the new way of thinking - It's going to crush your mission. Because you're going to start believing - well I don't want to tell them they're wrong, who am I to question their belief system, if it works for them that's great, God's too loving to punish anyone for sin → what's the point in sharing your faith then? This is a LIE.**

- The narrative of the world is that **If God exists, he exists to make you happy if you are a good person and generally do what's right.** There's a term for this - it's called **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**. God exists to make me happy and sooth the bad feelings I have. The Scriptures say something opposite - God exists for His glory, and in His glory is our eternal joy but His primary aim is not us and our happiness it's Him and His glory. God is about God. **If you don't renew your mind, live into this false narrative, it's going to crush your worship. Because God will become a genie to you and if he isn't showing up and doing exactly what you want to maximize your comfort and desires, then in your mind he ceases to be good and worthy of worship. This is a LIE.**
- The narrative of the world is that **the highest possible value is for me to discover my truest true self and then to aim the totality of my life at self expression and self actualization.** One writer calls it the **Age of Authenticity**. I have to live my truth, and anyone who keeps me back from living out my truest inner me is oppressive, harmful, and toxic. That's not the way of Jesus. Jesus came to be served, not to serve. The way of Christ and His followers is not one of self-actualization, it's one of self-denial. We lay down our wants, preferences, and desires for the good and blessing of others. **If you don't renew your mind it's going to crush your joy. The Bible says it's through laying down our lives that we find true life. But if your highest aim is to self-actualize, and anything that gets in the way is harmful and wrong, then eventually the Bible and Jesus are going to get in the way because at your core your sinful and want sinful things, and then next thing you know you're rejecting Christ and His teachings. This is a LIE.**

These narratives are pulling at us, lying to us from all angles. So we renew our minds. Word + Community so crucial. We put off our old way of thinking and put on minds renewed in the **power of the Spirit and the truths of God.**

Our Hearts

18 They are darkened in their understanding, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous...

	Old Self	New Self
Head	· Darkened minds · Separated from the life of God	· Truth of Jesus · Renewed minds
Heart	· Callous and hard hearts	
Hands		

It is not simply that before Christ we were ignorant to God, but that our hearts were cold towards Him. Even though His glory is all around us, we couldn't sense it or feel it or experience it because our hearts were dead and our eyes were blind.

We were made to know and be known by God. But sin has separated us from that. Now our hearts long for what they were created for. **And so in response to the gnawing of our hearts we've gone searching, seeking out anything that offers joy, life, purpose, hope, or belonging.**

17th Century French Mathematician Blaise Pascal once wrote, **"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."**

So apart from Christ we are deeply aware of this gnawing, this God-shaped vacuum. And so we go looking for whatever we think we give ourselves away to, whatever will fill it. And the more we try to shove things or people into that hole in our

hearts, we become more and more raw and beat up until eventually they are callous - no feeling anymore, no softness to God.

But that's our old hearts. We have been given new hearts.

This is what God says to His people in **Ezekiel 36:**

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

	Old Self	New Self
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Darkened minds· Separated from the life of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Truth of Jesus· Renewed minds
Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Callous and hard hearts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· New hearts soft to God
Hands		

God has done the work. In the work of salvation He takes away our old hearts of stone - callous and cold to Him and He gives us new and soft hearts to Him. Hearts that are receptive to the Spirit. Hearts that notice (v 27) - walk in God's statutes and obey His commands. **A symptom of a hard heart is resisting the commands of God, a soft heart desires obedience out of love for God.**

That's what God has done, now the command is to walk in light of that. To continually resist our hearts hardening to God, to continually stay soft to the things of God. The threat to the Ephesian church, and to us, is that we would let ourselves be as we were before Christ - cold to God and numb to the stirrings of the Spirit.

Fear of a callous heart. I don't know about you, but I am genuinely terrified of that for myself. It might be my #1 fear as a follower of Jesus - that I would grow numb to the things of God, where I stop being sensitive to His voice, stop being moved by the Spirit. To where sin would have such a hold on my life that I wouldn't even feel conviction anymore. Because I see how deceptive the devil can be, how deceptive our sin can be, how quickly our hearts can become callous, my heart can become callous. How quickly I can resign myself to hear the voice of the Lord, the commands of God's Word and think - "yeah, whatever."

I'm desperate for this not to be my story. I don't want to grow numb, I don't want to grow cold, I don't want to become hard hearted to the things of God. Self-seeking, selfish, self-serving.

I'm desperate for this not to be your story. I'm so incredibly aware of my inability to make you care about the things of God. All I can do is pray and plead.

We have to fight against this. Daily. Getting in God's Word. Staying receptive to the things of God. Constantly training ourselves to hear from Him. Obedience breeds obedience. The best way to soften your heart towards God is to choose to obey when you feel cold towards Him, and let the Spirit use that to soften your heart.

Our Hands

We need minds being renewed to think as God calls us to. We need hearts that are refreshed and soft to the Spirit. Let's finish by talking about our lives.

19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

	Old Self	New Self
Head	· Darkened minds · Separated from the life of God	· Truth of Jesus · Renewed minds
Heart	· Callous and hard hearts	· New hearts soft to God
Hands	· Greedy for sin	

Apart from Christ our problem is that we have an ignorant dead self that does not want God, but knows it needs something, and so we go looking for anything and anyone that we can give our lives away to.

And this is what Paul is warning the Ephesians against and reminding them they are not anymore. Don't chase after all of these things you used to chase after. Because of their callous hearts, Paul says they are *greedy for sins*. They have to keep going after more and more and more.

It's what psychologists would call the *pleasure paradox*. The more you search after these things to satisfy you and the more you need them to, the less they will. So you have to keep looking for more and more and more. More pleasure, more comfort, more goods, more more more.

But that's the old self. The old self who wasn't rooted in the approval of Christ. Who wasn't finding its rest and joy and satisfaction in Jesus.

24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

	Old Self	New Self
Head	· Darkened minds · Separated from the life of God	· Truth of Jesus · Renewed minds
Heart	· Callous and hard hearts	· New hearts soft to God
Hands	· Greedy for sin	· Pursuing righteousness + holiness

The old self runs after the things of this world to satisfy. The new self chases after the things of God. Lives that are set apart in true righteousness and holiness. Lives that are distinct and set apart from those around you. Finding our truest satisfaction in Christ and in the way of Jesus.

"Well everybody's doing it" ceases to be the refrain or excuse for followers of Jesus. We are called to put on the new self, which is holy - distinct, other, set apart for God.

Application

So how do we do this? How do we put off the old self and put on the new self? How do our head, heart, and hands actually look different? How do we live as citizens of God's Kingdom before we are citizens of North Carolina? Let's get into some nitty gritty. I got 4 applications for us as we close.

1. Become a Christian

20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him,

It's been a long time since Paul's visited Ephesus, and we know from some of his other letters to them that they have a false teacher problem. So here, in passing, he notes the necessity of hearing about the real Jesus. He wants to make sure they have heard of Christ and have come to know Him.

If you're not a Christian, none of this old self vs new self stuff matters for you right now. Because this isn't something we do on our own. This isn't something we do before we come to Jesus.

Christianity is not clean yourself up, then come to Christ. **It's not put off the old, put on the new, then come to Christ.**

All of this journey begins with coming to Christ. Believing in Him for forgiveness of sins. That's the only way you are saved. Christianity is not about moral rule keeping, religious attendance, "warm feelings" at a religious event, merely believing in a god, doing good things or knowing some religious facts. **It is about knowing Christ.**

So your first invitation if you're not a Christian is to trust in Jesus - that He lived the perfect life you couldn't, died the death you should've, and rose again defeating satan, sin, and death. If that's you, let's chat.

2. Stop Compromising with your Old Self

One of the things I love about this passage is how Paul leaves no room for justifications or excuses. No "but what abouts..." going on in Ephesians 4. You're a Christian. You're a follower of Jesus. Live like it.

I think for most of us in the room, the temptation for us is not that we would "be greedy to practice every kind of impurity." I don't think, for the most part, we're laying in bed at night thinking about all the ways we can rebel against Jesus.

Think back to hypothetical Bob at the beginning. It's easy for us to write off Ephesians 4 because our life is not even close to that incongruent. "That's a crazy example, that's not me! We think "For the most part..." And our lives, maybe for the most part, are lived in light of our gospel identity.

What I'm worried about most for our church is not the full fledged blow up, it's the daily compromises we make with our old selves.

It's the exceptions we want to make for ourselves. It's the clauses we want to write. It's the "yeah but did God really mean that?" You know who else asked "Did God really say?" The devil in Genesis 3 at the very first temptation in the garden.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce*, calls this temptation - the temptation to be **"almost innocent."** Being ok with being almost innocent. Almost righteous. Almost holy. Giving in just a little bit, because I've had a hard week or a hard month or a hard life, or this is just who I am, or I can't help myself, or it's really not a big deal.

"I'll take off my old self jacket. I'll take off my old self pants. I'll take off my old self shoes. But let me leave my socks! They're just socks! It's not a big deal. No one will notice anyways."

And we start living with a “Jesus-and” attitude. Jesus and this one thing that I know is not ok based on Scripture but I’ve found a way to reason my conviction down to a manageable level as long as I don’t ever sit in silence. Oh no, just me?

- Jesus and a comfortable life.
- Jesus and just like the occasional porn binge.
- Jesus and just like a little bit too much to drink.
- Jesus and my non-Christian girlfriend.
- Jesus and my apathy towards my neighbor.
- Jesus and...

Romans 13:4 says → **Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**

Colossians 3, where Paul is talking about this same idea of putting on and putting off and he says → **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.”**

Jesus Himself says in Matthew 5:29 - **if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.** Most likely hyperbole but the message is still the same → Our sin is not a game. It’s not a joke. Jesus had to die for it.

Stop compromising with what led Jesus to the cross.

Now you might be thinking - “Tim, this sounds a lot like legalism.” **I’m not talking about legalism, I’m talking about life with Christ.** I’m talking about having a life that actually takes seriously the calling to be righteous and holy, not just positionally with God but in the lived reality of our lives.

Stop compromising with your sin, and start killing your sin. Take no prisoners. Sin will not compromise, it wants all of you. Don’t play that game. Put it to death.

3. Join God in the work of personal renewal

23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

Let me Greek nerd out for a second, it’ll be really helpful I promise. In verse 23, when Paul says “be renewed” - he’s using a middle tense verb. We don’t have a really great equivalent in the English language, but in the Greek whenever you have a middle tense verb that means something is acting as both the **subject** and the **object**. You’re the one both doing the action and receiving the action continually.

This means that God is day-by-day, minute-by-minute renewing us in the image of Christ. God is doing a great work within us to continually take off the old and put on the new. But it also means we have a role in this too. We get to participate in our own renewal. We get to actively choose holiness. We get to actively choose not to sin.

Philippians 2 says it like this - **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you.”**

All of the Christian life is joining God in the work He is doing. That’s true when we’re on mission - joining God in what He is doing in the world around us. But it’s also true in our own lives - joining God in the work He wants to do within us as He changes us, and shapes us, and forms us.

Light Switch vs. Fire. We are often tempted to think of sanctification, or growing as a Christian, like a light switch. We want to do one thing, flip one switch, and suddenly be 100% exactly like Jesus. We want to show up to a gathering, or a

CG time, we want to open up our Bible one morning, or maybe we want to pray one prayer and suddenly boom → we're just like Jesus.

But that's not how it works. **Christian growth, sanctification is actually much less like a light switch and much more like tending to a fire.**

God starts the fire. He's the one that sets us aflame by the Holy Spirit. And then he calls us to a life of helping tend to the fire. To add kindling to the fire. Kindling is the small stuff you add to the big logs that helps the fire grow and sustain. A life of abiding in God, of putting off the old and putting on the new is a life of attending to the flame, of nurturing the flame more and more until it grows. Which means your sanctification is going to take a lot of time, a lot of patience, and a lot of grace from God. AND a lot of effort.

You have to make small decisions moment by moment, little by little, to build the fire and grow the fire and care for the fire, even as the Holy Spirit is the one who keeps it alame. It's not instantaneous. It's a series of small little things that grow up the fire.

- Choosing to read your Bible every day is kindling.
- Choosing to attend Community Group or a Gathering is kindling.
- Choosing to sing and be connected to worship on Sundays is kindling.
- Choosing to put software on your computer to help fight against porn is kindling.
- Choosing to turn off Netflix and engage with your neighbors or spouse or roommates is kindling.
- Choosing to shift a little bit of your budget that month for generosity towards your church or neighbor is kindling.

The person you are going to be in 20 years is the person you are becoming today. We think life is made up in the BIG moments, and you'll probably in the course of following Jesus, have a couple of those. But the stuff of following Jesus is in the mundane, day to day, little decisions by little decisions that seem like no big deal but have drastic implications for the work of God in your life.

Eugene Peterson: **"The enormous interest in "spirituality" these days is not accompanied by much, if any, interest in the long and intricate and daily business of formation in Christ. That is, the practice of the disposition and habits of the heart that changes our word spirituality from a wish or a desire or a fantasy or a diversion into an actual life lived to the glory of God."**

Many of us want to be more like Jesus in 10 years than we are now. The question is are we willing to take the small steps of sacrifice now. It's a slow fade away, but it's also a slow growth towards.

Gospel Conclusion

4. Keep going back to the gospel.

That's how you kill your sin. That's how you are renewed in the Spirit. Don't separate the warnings of chapter 4 from the promises of chapter 1. These prescriptions come after 3 chapters of gospel identity. The invitation here is to learn to live in light of who you already are in Christ Jesus.

When you became a Christian you received a new heart of flesh in place of your heart of stone. The Holy Spirit took up residence within you. You are a new creation. You were born again → You were regenerated. Now the urge is to say - "Ok, in light of what Christ has done, I'm going to learn to continually live in light of that."

- Not for my adoption, but from my adoption.
- Not for my forgiveness, but from my forgiveness.

- Not for my right standing with God, but from my right standing with God.
- Not for approval, but from the full approval of the Father.

God loves you. He views you as righteous. So you're freed up to seek congruence, learning to live in light of who you already are in Christ with the promise that one day Christ will return, we will join in His resurrection with new resurrected bodies, we will be glorified - the battle with our old selves will be no more because Christ has defeated satan, sin, and death.

Until that day we work and labor to put off the old and put on the new and live lives that match with the reality that we are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit.

Pray.

Communion.