

YOU CAN DO LIFE DIFFERENTLY**EPHESIANS 4:17- 5:7**

After this cold, snowy winter some of us are looking forward to once again getting out into our yards, getting our hands in some good, rich soil again, and seeing flowers, shrubs, trees, vegetables bloom and grow. Imagine with me a hot summer day in mid July that you have set aside for the Annual Grand Outdoor Project. You know what I mean - all capital letters – the Annual Grand Outdoor Project. All day long you sweat buckets, you dig in the dirt and you get powerfully dirty. The grime gradually turns your clothes darker and they begin to hang limp on your body. At the end of the day, you drag yourself into the house. Family members move away from you. You look bad. You smell worse. Even the dog avoids you. When you take off your jeans, they stand up on their own! Your T-shirt goes straight into the trash can rather than the clothes hamper. Your once white socks are different shades of black and brown. Moments later you emerge from a blissfully hot shower squeaky clean and smelling sweetly once again. But then imagine doing something almost incomprehensible. You strap on those dirt-encrusted jeans. You retrieve that sweaty, filthy, ruined T-shirt from the trash can and slip it back on. You struggle back into those unspeakable socks.

Now, who would ever do something that dumb or that repulsive? Christians. Taking off disgustingly dirty clothes and putting on fresh, clean clothes is the image or the metaphor that Paul uses in the section of Ephesians we consider today. Now, let's go back to 4:22-24 (NIV) and read those verses again. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Bible scholars are pretty much agreed that Paul has the imagery of clothing in mind here. It's as if you and I come to the Lord all dirty and filthy spiritually speaking. When we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we get a good, hot shower. We're clean! But then we make a choice every day. Are we going to put back on the old, filthy, disgusting clothes that represent our former life or are we going to put on the clean, beautiful clothes of our new life in Jesus? Let's be honest here. As strange as it seems, there is something about those old, filthy, disgusting clothes that still appeals to us. Your old way of life doesn't just instantly lose its appeal the moment you become a follower of Jesus. You have to resist some serious temptation not to return to it.

Paul's letter to the Christians living in and around Ephesus is all about our new identity as followers of Jesus. We are now children of the one, true King. Everything has changed. Part and parcel of this new reality is the great truth that you and I can do everyday life differently than before we became followers of Jesus. In fact, we must do life differently. Paul is really talking about transformation in these verses. The imagery about taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes is a way to address the need for constant inner, spiritual and total transformation once you become a follower of Jesus. So, let's keep that image before us as we walk through these verses. A first question....

WHY DO I NEED NEW CLOTHES?

The first thing Paul does here is build the case for transformation. Remember what's going on here. A good number of Jews living in and around Ephesus had received Jesus as their Messiah. But an overwhelming number of non-Jews or Gentiles had also become followers of Jesus. The Jewish Christians, by and large, already had a pretty moral lifestyle because of their knowledge of the Old Testament. The non-Jewish Christians, however, were a total disaster morally. They had to learn about the most basic, obvious expectations of what following Jesus looked like in everyday life. So, how does Paul describe a person without Jesus who needs to experience transformation at every level of his or her life?

First, without Jesus I pursue things that don't matter. Paul puts it like this, "With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused." (Eph 4:17 NLT) Confused about what? Without Jesus, you are hopelessly confused about what matters in this life. You end up pursuing the wrong priorities, setting the wrong goals, and making important what is essentially unimportant. If you need any confirmation of that basic truth, just check out 99% of the reality TV shows being shown this week and the idiotic celebrity culture that dominates our country at present.

Second, without Jesus my mind is warped by sin. Paul says, "Their minds are full of darkness...." (Eph 4:18 NLT) One Bible scholar translated this phrase as "intellectually (people without Jesus) are blacked out...." This is a direct reference to a person's intellectual capacity. Without a correct understanding of God – and even more importantly – a correct relationship with God, any person is intellectually limited. Yes, you can be brilliant and have multiple degrees to prove it, but if you dismiss God or put Him on the shelf, so to speak, you eliminate the source of all true intelligence. Your intellect will be limited.

Third, without Jesus my heart is hardened against God. "...they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him." (Eph 4:18 NLT) At some point your ignorance about God becomes a matter of stubborn unwillingness to have anything to do with Him. Have you ever seen a piece of petrified wood – wood that has actually turned to stone? That can happen to a human being spiritually when it comes to God. You can become hard, impenetrable and resistant to His love, His grace and His will for your life. The result of that hardness of heart is even further separation or distance from God. You wander far away from the life God gives.

Fourth, without Jesus my conscience becomes unreliable. "They have no sense of shame...." (Eph 4:19 NLT) Your conscience is a kind of innate warning system to remind you when your behavior is wrong. It's kind of like that annoying alarm in your car that reminds you that you don't have your seat belt on. Some folk figure out how to turn that alarm off. Sometimes people figure out how to

turn off their conscience, too. If you resist your conscience long enough, and it will no longer bother you. It will become unreliable or cease to exist.

Fifth, without Jesus my lifestyle choices reveal my condition. "... They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity." (Eph 4:19 NLT) You might think that Paul has sexual sins in mind here, but it's really more about sensuality – living as if the only reality is what you can experience with your senses. In other words, what matters is living for what you can see, smell, hear, taste or touch. Because God and the spiritual dimension of life no longer matters, you become the ultimate materialist. When that happens, people become greedy – always wanting more and more of what they can see, smell, hear, taste and touch. Paul has just described the majority culture of the United States of America and indeed the world. What do most people who live on your street, work in your office, attend your school or even live in your home really want? They live for things. They want to get more stuff. When you become a child of the one, true King, you need to get rid of some filthy, smelly, disgusting old clothes and put on some new ones. A second question...

WHAT DO MY NEW CLOTHES LOOK LIKE?

The next thing Paul does is get very specific about these new clothes. This is what spiritual transformation looks like for a person who has become a follower of Jesus. I don't think Paul was trying to be exhaustive here. Instead, he probably addresses directly the issues that he'd heard about that were a problem of some kind right there in the Ephesian church. Remember, those non-Jewish or Gentile Christians were coming out of completely immoral, pagan lifestyles. They had to be taught the most basic, obvious right from wrong. I see in these verses a call by Paul to put on at least seven kinds of new, spiritual clothing.

For instance, Paul says put on telling the truth. "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." (Eph 4:25 NLT) With many of these new pieces of clothing, he starts with the negative and then goes to the positive. In other words, if you want to put on the fresh, clean clothes, you've got to take off and get rid of the foul, filthy clothes. So, stop lying and then tell the truth! Lying starts small and then just grows bigger until it becomes a powerful habit in your life. Paul implies that lying to fellow Christians is particularly damaging. Because we are each a part of the Body of Christ, it's like your ear telling your arm a lie. Take off lying; put on telling the truth.

Next, put on controlling my anger. "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil..... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior." (Eph 4:26-27, 31 NLT) The Bible never says that all anger is sin. Jesus got angry with the Pharisees' hardness of heart. He was angry when He drove out the buyers and sellers in the Temple with a whip. In fact, there are times you should get angry: abortion, the abuse of wives and

children, hunger, when poor people are exploited – just to name a few. Anger is a normal, even healthy human emotion, but anger can become its own problem when you nurse it and allow it become long term resentment. When you allow anger to get entrenched in your spirit, it becomes an ally of the devil himself. It's a weapon he'll use against you. Entrenched anger that turns into bitterness and resentment can damage you, your family, and your church. Take off uncontrolled anger; put on controlled anger.

The next piece of new clothing Paul suggests that I put on is financial responsibility. "If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need." (Eph 4:28 NLT) I know that it sounds painfully obvious to us that a follower of Jesus shouldn't steal, but apparently some new Gentile believers there in Ephesus hadn't figured that out yet. The assumption that stealing was just a way to supplement your income had to be challenged. It's also possible that Paul had in mind here other ways of stealing. There is sneaky stealing. When you refuse to work and become unnecessarily dependent on others, that's theft. When you fail to give an honest day's work for a day's pay, you steal. When you underpay your employees, you're a thief. Be financially responsible and don't hoard what you make. There are those who have legitimate needs, so be ready and willing to help those who need it. Take off stealing; put on financial responsibility. Work. Earn. Give.

Next, put on using my mouth for good. "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.... Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God." (Eph 4:29, 5:4 NLT) You probably already know the kind of talk we all need to avoid: conversations that tear other people down when they're not there to defend themselves, words that attack a person's dignity, worth and value before God, stories and jokes that are dirty or coarse. It's the type of talk that happens at your place of work or your school all the time. Don't enter into it. Don't bring it home. Don't bring it into your church. Instead, use your mouth and your words for what builds up others and edifies them. More words of praise. More words of encouragement. More sharing about what the Lord means to you and your gratitude for how He has blessed you.

Your use of words matter far more than you realize. There's a country church in a small village in Croatia. One day near the beginning of the 20th century, an altar boy named Josip Broz served the priest at Sunday Mass. The boy accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. It smashed to pieces. The priest struck Josip on the cheek and shouted in a gruff voice, "Leave the altar and don't come back." He never did. Josip Broz grew up to become Tito, the Communist dictator of Yugoslavia until his death. About the same year, an altar boy named John served Mass at a Roman Catholic cathedral in Peoria, Illinois. He, too, accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. The priest that day was none other than the bishop himself. When the glass shattered to pieces on the marble

floor, John was frightened to death. With a warm twinkle in his eye, the bishop gently whispered to John, “Someday you will be just as I am.” That altar boy grew up to become Archbishop Fulton John Sheen, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for Jesus in the 20th century. What a difference the words of two different priests at Mass made in the lives of those boys! Take off all foul and abusive language; put on using your mouth only for good.

I see here in these verses a call to put on the clothing of forgiveness “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (Eph 4: 31-32 NLT) Practicing forgiveness is pretty easy until you actually have to do it. I love an analogy that comes from Corrie ten Boom. She was a Dutch Christian who spent time in a Nazi concentration camp for hiding Jews in her home. She had to learn how to forgive some people some very terrible things. She learned that forgiveness is like a bell hanging way up high in a church tower. Someone pulls on the rope and it dings, dongs, clangs and bangs. Once that person lets go, the bell will keep on ringing for a while all by itself. But it becomes slower and slower and eventually it will stop. The hurts in life are like that clanging bell. When you forgive, by the grace of God, you take your hand off the rope and you refuse to keep tugging on it. Eventually, the feelings become less and less until they stop altogether. Take off bitterness and rage; put on forgiveness. If God could forgive you of the sin that sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for you, how can you dare to withhold forgiveness from anyone who has mistreated you?

Paul says some things here that I would call putting on the clothing of generosity. “...give generously to others in need.... Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be no... greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people.... You can be sure that no...greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.” (Eph 4:28; 5:2-3, 5 NLT). The opposite of generosity is greed. You live life focused on getting and having more. Greed is a form of idolatry, because it allows some possession, some person, or some ambition to take the place of God. But a follower of Jesus follows the example of the greatest Giver in the universe – the One who gave up His own life so that we could have eternal life. You learn how to give your life away in the name of Jesus. You live with an open hand. You become generous with your time, your talents and your treasure. Take off greed; put on generosity.

Finally, Paul says here to put on sex God’s way. “They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.... Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity... among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people.... You can be sure that no immoral, impure...person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Eph 4:19, 5:3, 5 NLT) Remember again that non-Jewish, Gentile culture was an “anything goes” culture sexually.

Hardly anyone considered sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, homosexual sex, incest, bestiality or even religious prostitution as anything displeasing to God. People just didn't think that way at all.

When people today say, "Oh, Rick, things have changed since Bible times. The culture back then was so conservative. Sexual morality has evolved over the centuries. Now we know that as long as you have consenting adults, no one is really injured. As long as people love each other, that's what really matters" - they advertise their own ignorance. It was not conservative! Sexual morality was even looser in Paul's time than it is today. But he knew something we easily forget. God invented sex, not human beings. God has made it crystal clear that sex is His beautiful creation and gift to be enjoyed by a man and a woman in a life long commitment called marriage. When you engage in sex out of the context God intended for it, you invite unbelievable pain upon yourself and others. Believe me when I tell you after 35 years as a pastor and sometimes knowing a lot of private things about people, that nothing causes more heartache, more pain, more damage and more destruction than the misuse of sex. When you buy what the culture is selling instead of what God says, it reminds me of what Paul says here, "Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him." (Eph 5:6 NLT) Don't call good what God calls bad. Don't condone what God forbids. Don't practice what God prohibits. Take off the culture's perspective on sex; put on sex God's way. Let me answer a third and final question very quickly.

HOW DO YOU PUT MY NEW CLOTHES ON?

Again, this is all about transformation. Paul makes the case for transformation and then he has a pretty long section that gives us a snapshot of what real, specific, actual transformation looks like. But I don't want you to walk out of here today without hearing or being reminded about the process of transformation. First, I must have God's help. If you think you can take off all these old clothes and put on all these new clothes through trying really hard to be good, you are in for a major disillusionment. You will fail. One of the reasons God gave you His Holy Spirit is to give you His power and presence to do what you can never do in your own strength. Second, God will not do it for me. I know that sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. Taking off and getting rid of some bad attitudes and some ungodly behavior is going to require a kind of dying inside of you. You are going to have to change. You are going to have to resist temptation. You are going to have to make some hard, deliberate choices. You are going to have to say no to some things inside of you that say yes or why not.

Third and finally, transformation is a lifelong process. It is something gradual that happens over time. Sometimes you are aware of it happening; other times you won't be. What you and I need is a balanced approach. One the one hand, don't get lazy and self-satisfied, because that just means you're about to put on some really smelly, dirty clothes all over again. On the other hand, don't get so

discouraged when you fail or when you see your lack of progress, that you give up. God has his own timetable and he'll finish the job sure enough. You just stay surrendered to His Lordship of your life and be ready to grow and learn. None of us ever reach full transformation in this life. That's for Heaven! Right up until the moment I pass from this life until the next, I fully expect the Holy Spirit to be saying to me, "Here, Rick, take this off and put this on."

Stuart Briscoe is a pastor and author. When he was a young man he joined the British Royal Marines. He was really impressed by the magnificent Royal Marine dress uniform and thought he would get one of those uniforms immediately. But they didn't give him one for months. When Briscoe asked about it, he was told, "You are a Marine. The moment you walked through the gates, you became a Marine. You are Marine to stay." Briscoe said, "Give me one of those dress uniforms then." They replied, "You're not fit to wear one yet. We'll have to do something about your posture – how you hold your back, your chest and your shoulders. We'll have to teach you how to march, how to walk, how to look and behave like a Marine. Then you can wear the dress uniform." Stuart Briscoe was a Royal Marine the moment he was sworn into that position, but it took him a long time wear the uniform. You became a child of the one, true King the moment you put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord for this life and for eternity. But it will take the rest of your life to put on fully the new spiritual clothing God makes available to you. Every day you will have to make choices that involve taking off and putting on, taking off and putting on. And only when you get to Heaven, will you wear fully and completely the uniform of a child of the one, true King.

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turn off their conscience, too. If you resist your conscience long enough, and it will no longer bother you. It will become unreliable or cease to exist.

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For instance, Paul says put on telling the truth. "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." (Eph 4:25 NLT) With many of these new pieces of clothing, he starts with the negative and then goes to the positive. In other words, if you want to put on the fresh, clean clothes, you've got to take off and get rid of the foul, filthy clothes. So, stop lying and then tell the truth! Lying starts small and then just grows bigger until it becomes a powerful habit in your life. Paul implies that lying to fellow Christians is particularly damaging. Because we are each a part of the Body of Christ, it's like your ear telling your arm a lie. Take off lying; put on telling the truth.

Next, put on controlling my anger. "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil..... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior." (Eph 4:26-27, 31 NLT) The Bible never says that all anger is sin. Jesus got angry with the Pharisees' hardness of heart. He was angry when He drove out the buyers and sellers in the Temple with a whip. In fact, there are times you should get angry: abortion, the abuse of wives and

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Next, put on using my mouth for good. "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.... Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God." (Eph 4:29, 5:4 NLT) You probably already know the kind of talk we all need to avoid: conversations that tear other people down when they're not there to defend themselves, words that attack a person's dignity, worth and value before God, stories and jokes that are dirty or coarse. It's the type of talk that happens at your place of work or your school all the time. Don't enter into it. Don't bring it home. Don't bring it into your church. Instead, use your mouth and your words for what builds up others and edifies them. More words of praise. More words of encouragement. More sharing about what the Lord means to you and your gratitude for how He has blessed you.

Your use of words matter far more than you realize. There's a country church in a small village in Croatia. One day near the beginning of the 20th century, an altar boy named Josip Broz served the priest at Sunday Mass. The boy accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. It smashed to pieces. The priest struck Josip on the cheek and shouted in a gruff voice, "Leave the altar and don't come back." He never did. Josip Broz grew up to become Tito, the Communist dictator of Yugoslavia until his death. About the same year, an altar boy named John served Mass at a Roman Catholic cathedral in Peoria, Illinois. He, too, accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. The priest that day was none other than the bishop himself. When the glass shattered to pieces on the marble

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Paul says some things here that I would call putting on the clothing of generosity. “...give generously to others in need.... Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be no... greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people.... You can be sure that no...greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.” (Eph 4:28; 5:2-3, 5 NLT). The opposite of generosity is greed. You live life focused on getting and having more. Greed is a form of idolatry, because it allows some possession, some person, or some ambition to take the place of God. But a follower of Jesus follows the example of the greatest Giver in the universe – the One who gave up His own life so that we could have eternal life. You learn how to give your life away in the name of Jesus. You live with an open hand. You become generous with your time, your talents and your treasure. Take off greed; put on generosity.

Finally, Paul says here to put on sex God’s way. “They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.... Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity... among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people.... You can be sure that no immoral, impure...person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Eph 4:19, 5:3, 5 NLT) Remember again that non-Jewish, Gentile culture was an “anything goes” culture sexually.

Hardly anyone considered sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, homosexual sex, incest, bestiality or even religious prostitution as anything displeasing to God. People just didn't think that way at all.

When people today say, "Oh, Rick, things have changed since Bible times. The culture back then was so conservative. Sexual morality has evolved over the centuries. Now we know that as long as you have consenting adults, no one is really injured. As long as people love each other, that's what really matters" - they advertise their own ignorance. It was not conservative! Sexual morality was even looser in Paul's time than it is today. But he knew something we easily forget. God invented sex, not human beings. God has made it crystal clear that sex is His beautiful creation and gift to be enjoyed by a man and a woman in a life long commitment called marriage. When you engage in sex out of the context God intended for it, you invite unbelievable pain upon yourself and others. Believe me when I tell you after 35 years as a pastor and sometimes knowing a lot of private things about people, that nothing causes more heartache, more pain, more damage and more destruction than the misuse of sex. When you buy what the culture is selling instead of what God says, it reminds me of what Paul says here, "Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him." (Eph 5:6 NLT) Don't call good what God calls bad. Don't condone what God forbids. Don't practice what God prohibits. Take off the culture's perspective on sex; put on sex God's way. Let me answer a third and final question very quickly.

HOW DO YOU PUT MY NEW CLOTHES ON?

Again, this is all about transformation. Paul makes the case for transformation and then he has a pretty long section that gives us a snapshot of what real, specific, actual transformation looks like. But I don't want you to walk out of here today without hearing or being reminded about the process of transformation. First, I must have God's help. If you think you can take off all these old clothes and put on all these new clothes through trying really hard to be good, you are in for a major disillusionment. You will fail. One of the reasons God gave you His Holy Spirit is to give you His power and presence to do what you can never do in your own strength. Second, God will not do it for me. I know that sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. Taking off and getting rid of some bad attitudes and some ungodly behavior is going to require a kind of dying inside of you. You are going to have to change. You are going to have to resist temptation. You are going to have to make some hard, deliberate choices. You are going to have to say no to some things inside of you that say yes or why not.

Third and finally, transformation is a lifelong process. It is something gradual that happens over time. Sometimes you are aware of it happening; other times you won't be. What you and I need is a balanced approach. One the one hand, don't get lazy and self-satisfied, because that just means you're about to put on some really smelly, dirty clothes all over again. On the other hand, don't get so

discouraged when you fail or when you see your lack of progress, that you give up. God has his own timetable and he'll finish the job sure enough. You just stay surrendered to His Lordship of your life and be ready to grow and learn. None of us ever reach full transformation in this life. That's for Heaven! Right up until the moment I pass from this life until the next, I fully expect the Holy Spirit to be saying to me, "Here, Rick, take this off and put this on."

Stuart Briscoe is a pastor and author. When he was a young man he joined the British Royal Marines. He was really impressed by the magnificent Royal Marine dress uniform and thought he would get one of those uniforms immediately. But they didn't give him one for months. When Briscoe asked about it, he was told, "You are a Marine. The moment you walked through the gates, you became a Marine. You are Marine to stay." Briscoe said, "Give me one of those dress uniforms then." They replied, "You're not fit to wear one yet. We'll have to do something about your posture – how you hold your back, your chest and your shoulders. We'll have to teach you how to march, how to walk, how to look and behave like a Marine. Then you can wear the dress uniform." Stuart Briscoe was a Royal Marine the moment he was sworn into that position, but it took him a long time wear the uniform. You became a child of the one, true King the moment you put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord for this life and for eternity. But it will take the rest of your life to put on fully the new spiritual clothing God makes available to you. Every day you will have to make choices that involve taking off and putting on, taking off and putting on. And only when you get to Heaven, will you wear fully and completely the uniform of a child of the one, true King.

YOU CAN DO LIFE DIFFERENTLY**EPHESIANS 4:17- 5:7**

After this cold, snowy winter some of us are looking forward to once again getting out into our yards, getting our hands in some good, rich soil again, and seeing flowers, shrubs, trees, vegetables bloom and grow. Imagine with me a hot summer day in mid July that you have set aside for the Annual Grand Outdoor Project. You know what I mean - all capital letters – the Annual Grand Outdoor Project. All day long you sweat buckets, you dig in the dirt and you get powerfully dirty. The grime gradually turns your clothes darker and they begin to hang limp on your body. At the end of the day, you drag yourself into the house. Family members move away from you. You look bad. You smell worse. Even the dog avoids you. When you take off your jeans, they stand up on their own! Your T-shirt goes straight into the trash can rather than the clothes hamper. Your once white socks are different shades of black and brown. Moments later you emerge from a blissfully hot shower squeaky clean and smelling sweetly once again. But then imagine doing something almost incomprehensible. You strap on those dirt-encrusted jeans. You retrieve that sweaty, filthy, ruined T-shirt from the trash can and slip it back on. You struggle back into those unspeakable socks.

Now, who would ever do something that dumb or that repulsive? Christians. Taking off disgustingly dirty clothes and putting on fresh, clean clothes is the image or the metaphor that Paul uses in the section of Ephesians we consider today. Now, let's go back to 4:22-24 (NIV) and read those verses again. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Bible scholars are pretty much agreed that Paul has the imagery of clothing in mind here. It's as if you and I come to the Lord all dirty and filthy spiritually speaking. When we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we get a good, hot shower. We're clean! But then we make a choice every day. Are we going to put back on the old, filthy, disgusting clothes that represent our former life or are we going to put on the clean, beautiful clothes of our new life in Jesus? Let's be honest here. As strange as it seems, there is something about those old, filthy, disgusting clothes that still appeals to us. Your old way of life doesn't just instantly lose its appeal the moment you become a follower of Jesus. You have to resist some serious temptation not to return to it.

Paul's letter to the Christians living in and around Ephesus is all about our new identity as followers of Jesus. We are now children of the one, true King. Everything has changed. Part and parcel of this new reality is the great truth that you and I can do everyday life differently than before we became followers of Jesus. In fact, we must do life differently. Paul is really talking about transformation in these verses. The imagery about taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes is a way to address the need for constant inner, spiritual and total transformation once you become a follower of Jesus. So, let's keep that image before us as we walk through these verses. A first question....

WHY DO I NEED NEW CLOTHES?

The first thing Paul does here is build the case for transformation. Remember what's going on here. A good number of Jews living in and around Ephesus had received Jesus as their Messiah. But an overwhelming number of non-Jews or Gentiles had also become followers of Jesus. The Jewish Christians, by and large, already had a pretty moral lifestyle because of their knowledge of the Old Testament. The non-Jewish Christians, however, were a total disaster morally. They had to learn about the most basic, obvious expectations of what following Jesus looked like in everyday life. So, how does Paul describe a person without Jesus who needs to experience transformation at every level of his or her life?

First, without Jesus I pursue things that don't matter. Paul puts it like this, "With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused." (Eph 4:17 NLT) Confused about what? Without Jesus, you are hopelessly confused about what matters in this life. You end up pursuing the wrong priorities, setting the wrong goals, and making important what is essentially unimportant. If you need any confirmation of that basic truth, just check out 99% of the reality TV shows being shown this week and the idiotic celebrity culture that dominates our country at present.

Second, without Jesus my mind is warped by sin. Paul says, "Their minds are full of darkness...." (Eph 4:18 NLT) One Bible scholar translated this phrase as "intellectually (people without Jesus) are blacked out...." This is a direct reference to a person's intellectual capacity. Without a correct understanding of God – and even more importantly – a correct relationship with God, any person is intellectually limited. Yes, you can be brilliant and have multiple degrees to prove it, but if you dismiss God or put Him on the shelf, so to speak, you eliminate the source of all true intelligence. Your intellect will be limited.

Third, without Jesus my heart is hardened against God. "...they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him." (Eph 4:18 NLT) At some point your ignorance about God becomes a matter of stubborn unwillingness to have anything to do with Him. Have you ever seen a piece of petrified wood – wood that has actually turned to stone? That can happen to a human being spiritually when it comes to God. You can become hard, impenetrable and resistant to His love, His grace and His will for your life. The result of that hardness of heart is even further separation or distance from God. You wander far away from the life God gives.

Fourth, without Jesus my conscience becomes unreliable. "They have no sense of shame...." (Eph 4:19 NLT) Your conscience is a kind of innate warning system to remind you when your behavior is wrong. It's kind of like that annoying alarm in your car that reminds you that you don't have your seat belt on. Some folk figure out how to turn that alarm off. Sometimes people figure out how to

turn off their conscience, too. If you resist your conscience long enough, and it will no longer bother you. It will become unreliable or cease to exist.

Fifth, without Jesus my lifestyle choices reveal my condition. "... They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity." (Eph 4:19 NLT) You might think that Paul has sexual sins in mind here, but it's really more about sensuality – living as if the only reality is what you can experience with your senses. In other words, what matters is living for what you can see, smell, hear, taste or touch. Because God and the spiritual dimension of life no longer matters, you become the ultimate materialist. When that happens, people become greedy – always wanting more and more of what they can see, smell, hear, taste and touch. Paul has just described the majority culture of the United States of America and indeed the world. What do most people who live on your street, work in your office, attend your school or even live in your home really want? They live for things. They want to get more stuff. When you become a child of the one, true King, you need to get rid of some filthy, smelly, disgusting old clothes and put on some new ones. A second question...

WHAT DO MY NEW CLOTHES LOOK LIKE?

The next thing Paul does is get very specific about these new clothes. This is what spiritual transformation looks like for a person who has become a follower of Jesus. I don't think Paul was trying to be exhaustive here. Instead, he probably addresses directly the issues that he'd heard about that were a problem of some kind right there in the Ephesian church. Remember, those non-Jewish or Gentile Christians were coming out of completely immoral, pagan lifestyles. They had to be taught the most basic, obvious right from wrong. I see in these verses a call by Paul to put on at least seven kinds of new, spiritual clothing.

For instance, Paul says put on telling the truth. "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." (Eph 4:25 NLT) With many of these new pieces of clothing, he starts with the negative and then goes to the positive. In other words, if you want to put on the fresh, clean clothes, you've got to take off and get rid of the foul, filthy clothes. So, stop lying and then tell the truth! Lying starts small and then just grows bigger until it becomes a powerful habit in your life. Paul implies that lying to fellow Christians is particularly damaging. Because we are each a part of the Body of Christ, it's like your ear telling your arm a lie. Take off lying; put on telling the truth.

Next, put on controlling my anger. "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil..... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior." (Eph 4:26-27, 31 NLT) The Bible never says that all anger is sin. Jesus got angry with the Pharisees' hardness of heart. He was angry when He drove out the buyers and sellers in the Temple with a whip. In fact, there are times you should get angry: abortion, the abuse of wives and

children, hunger, when poor people are exploited – just to name a few. Anger is a normal, even healthy human emotion, but anger can become its own problem when you nurse it and allow it become long term resentment. When you allow anger to get entrenched in your spirit, it becomes an ally of the devil himself. It's a weapon he'll use against you. Entrenched anger that turns into bitterness and resentment can damage you, your family, and your church. Take off uncontrolled anger; put on controlled anger.

The next piece of new clothing Paul suggests that I put on is financial responsibility. "If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need." (Eph 4:28 NLT) I know that it sounds painfully obvious to us that a follower of Jesus shouldn't steal, but apparently some new Gentile believers there in Ephesus hadn't figured that out yet. The assumption that stealing was just a way to supplement your income had to be challenged. It's also possible that Paul had in mind here other ways of stealing. There is sneaky stealing. When you refuse to work and become unnecessarily dependent on others, that's theft. When you fail to give an honest day's work for a day's pay, you steal. When you underpay your employees, you're a thief. Be financially responsible and don't hoard what you make. There are those who have legitimate needs, so be ready and willing to help those who need it. Take off stealing; put on financial responsibility. Work. Earn. Give.

Next, put on using my mouth for good. "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.... Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God." (Eph 4:29, 5:4 NLT) You probably already know the kind of talk we all need to avoid: conversations that tear other people down when they're not there to defend themselves, words that attack a person's dignity, worth and value before God, stories and jokes that are dirty or coarse. It's the type of talk that happens at your place of work or your school all the time. Don't enter into it. Don't bring it home. Don't bring it into your church. Instead, use your mouth and your words for what builds up others and edifies them. More words of praise. More words of encouragement. More sharing about what the Lord means to you and your gratitude for how He has blessed you.

Your use of words matter far more than you realize. There's a country church in a small village in Croatia. One day near the beginning of the 20th century, an altar boy named Josip Broz served the priest at Sunday Mass. The boy accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. It smashed to pieces. The priest struck Josip on the cheek and shouted in a gruff voice, "Leave the altar and don't come back." He never did. Josip Broz grew up to become Tito, the Communist dictator of Yugoslavia until his death. About the same year, an altar boy named John served Mass at a Roman Catholic cathedral in Peoria, Illinois. He, too, accidentally dropped a glass container of wine. The priest that day was none other than the bishop himself. When the glass shattered to pieces on the marble

floor, John was frightened to death. With a warm twinkle in his eye, the bishop gently whispered to John, “Someday you will be just as I am.” That altar boy grew up to become Archbishop Fulton John Sheen, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for Jesus in the 20th century. What a difference the words of two different priests at Mass made in the lives of those boys! Take off all foul and abusive language; put on using your mouth only for good.

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