

## Ephesians 4:17-5:2

### What To Wear?

**Eph 4:17-32** (ESV) *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Isn't it interesting how Paul starts v.17 with: "Stop living like Gentiles"? He is writing to Gentiles in the most Gentile of Gentile cities in the Roman Empire! Then Paul describes Gentiles in a way that is, let's be blunt, *INSULTING!* This is quite a contrast to the way he describes the Ephesians in Chapter 2, when he says they *WERE* dead to God and *WERE* strangers to God (because, after all, they were Gentiles), and that a new Father had adopted them and raised them up to the Heavenly realm and rule. Now Paul comes around to bluntly say, "Stop living as though nothing has changed! You are citizens of God's Kingdom, no longer Gentiles, or Jews, but new creatures of a new race!"

What Paul says is both true, and *NOT* true. If I am honest I still live "like a Gentile". But in order for me to be honest, Paul had to point it out first. After all of the wonderful things he has said up to this point, when Paul was more positive and telling us about our calling, the gifts we have been given, and our union with Christ, and how we are able to grow upward in humility and on to maturity and no longer be like children. Now he seems to say we are actually worse than the immature children he talked about before. We are Gentiles of the worst sort. The big problem with breaking Chapter 2 into parts is we miss the contrast, but we also miss how Paul is making us realize that our new life is not to be an improvement on the old. There is a complete change, or a "rebirth" as Jesus liked to say. Paul wants the old life gone and over. What Paul says in 4:1 is "I urge you to step up beside me and live in a manner worthy of God's call on your life." Or, to put in another way, "Live up to the standards of the job description."

And he frames that at the end where he says, *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love...”*(5:1) And right in the middle of this he tells us to stop walking, living, like Gentiles. That kind of life falls very short of the standard, which is God Himself, as seen clearly by the way Jesus lived. To imitate God means to *“Start living like Christ.”*

So *“What To Wear?”* We have all heard that: “What do I wear?” Our wives anxiously ask us, “What will I wear?” because they know that what we wear says something about us, whether we are conscious of it or not, where men are often clueless. The point is we have a choice in what we wear. When God calls us to adoption and sonship, he takes us as we are, still dirty and disheveled and in our old clothes. But He does give us new ones. Paul says taking off and completely getting rid of the “old things” in our lives and then taking up the new garments is really up to us. We have to want this! Remember the three points in the last section: Believers must be committed to Unity, Ministry and Maturity. God our Father certainly is. And patching up the old clothes? No good. Won’t work. Jesus had a parable for that. We find it in Mark when the Pharisees asked the disciples why they did not fast and do right religious things. Jesus told them: *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new patch tears away from old garment and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the old skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”* (Mark 2:21-22) Jesus comes to give us brand new clothes, not a patch job on the old ones. And He is putting new wine needs new skins—God’s life coming into a new creation in us. In this parable Jesus has been talking about a wedding feast, where people wore their very best, and served the best wine, and life is celebrated and enjoyed. Sometimes we are just like the Pharisees, because we think we can add Jesus into our old system of life and make it better, like patching up an old house. But Paul says NO! That is not new life, it is simply covering and hiding what we really are inside.

The real heart of our section, where Paul says, *“... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* (4:22-24), is the clothing metaphor. The old life, the old ambitions and the old ideas are corrupt and deceitful, no matter how much we tell ourselves there was some good in them. The Pharisees, though they were good men in many ways, saw no reason to give up their old ideas and traditions. The Gentiles in Ephesus had ideas that seemed just as good to them. Paul is assuring them they are not. The new self is newly created in the likeness of God. As God's new children, Paul wants us to grow and act like our new Father, because God really has marked out the path of our new vocation. *“We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*(2:10) We cannot improve on what He has created and planned. Paul says turn our backs on the old ways and grow into the new life that is the new Kingdom of Christ in the here and now.

Now we come to a real danger point. It is here that many Christians go totally blind to reality. It is easy to look at the behaviors that Paul lists here, and think that by getting our bodies to do certain things and not to do other things I am living the new life. While that is important, Paul thinks we have it backwards. It isn’t about changing the body, the external. It is about changing the mind, the internal. We can’t change anything until we change the mind, and that means we have to get rid of old ideas, even religious ones. Listen to what Jesus says when the Pharisees were asking the disciples why

they refused to ritually wash their hands: *And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." Peter can't understand what Jesus means. He is thinking with his old religious mind: But Peter said to him, 'Explain the parable to us.'* And Jesus said, *'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.'*" (Matt 15:10-11,15-20)

Notice that Peter and the disciples themselves did not get it either. It is all about being honest about what and who we really are on the inside. If it gets us what we want, we can be kind, considerate, patient, generous, even self-sacrificing. We would say a person like that is a good Christian, and the Pharisee would say he was a good Jew. Of course, there are the people who are mean, egotistical, selfish and self-serving. The kind of Gentiles Paul describe as *"...callous and given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (v.19)*. They will lie and steal at any opportunity. We know for certain *those people* aren't Christians! As I pointed out already, Paul is talking about the extremes of Gentile darkness as he opens this section, but he is talking to everyone. He knows we all have a blend of various traits, both good and bad. Paul himself would admit that about himself (and he does in Romans Chapter 7). We can see that this is true—if we can be honest with ourselves. What happens if we plan on something and it doesn't go our way? Especially after we have been polite and nice, and even humble! The anger and self-pity that follows is usually a pretty good sign that we are seeking our interests over everyone else's. We want our way. We want to be number one, in charge, admired and well thought of. And other people are not doing it right, or they are not appreciating all of "my hard work and brilliance!" We may not show all of the inner turmoil outwardly because we hide it. It eats away at us in our minds. But as Jesus clearly pointed out, what is in the mind will eventually come out and boil over as vile poisonous behavior.

The mind of the religious Pharisee and the mind of the pagan Gentile (that's us) are both foolish, with darkened understanding and deep-seated ignorance about who God really is and what He is like, and a hard-heartedness that has no real concern for anyone else, and may end up with no sense of right and wrong. From that mindset comes the behavior we should expect: *They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.(v.19)* What we do with our bodies, which is our life-style, is a product of the mind. That is why Paul says in v.23 *"... be renewed in the spirit of your minds"* and he says that *BEFORE* he says, *"put on the new self"* in v.24. *HOW* are we renewed in mind and heart on the inside? Paul said it is when we learn about Christ and when we learn from Jesus. When he says *"learned about Christ"* and he uses the word that means *"learning by experience ...to gain understanding by means of a process"*<sup>1</sup> The writer of Hebrews uses this about Jesus: *"Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."* (Heb 5:8) Jesus had to *learn* obedience as a human through all of His experiences and trials. It was a process. He suffered not as an example to show us the way and how to live, but He suffered for us to show us He *IS* the way, He *IS* the Life—His *LIFE* in us. Then Paul says we were *"taught in Him"*, and he uses a word for teaching that really means instruction, and for a Jew like Paul that would mean learning the Torah<sup>2</sup>. For the

Christian it means learning the facts, the truth, about who Jesus really is; it is the “didactics” and the doctrines of the Church.

One big problem for the Church and for Christians *“is the persistent idea that has made its way into the popular culture today: to be a Christian means closing off your mind, ceasing all serious thought, and living in a shallow fantasy world divorced from the solid truths of the real life of modern science and education.”*<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning the Apostles taught that knowledge and understanding were the foundation of faith, which is why Paul says it is what we learn about Christ and Jesus that really changes the mind and that means a change in our lives. It is being open to the ever wider range of insight and imagination that comes with learning all we can about this marvelous and powerful King we serve—Jesus Himself. And as we learn about Jesus we see ourselves in a new and honest way. We see that the attitudes and agendas may be comfortable and familiar to us, but they are not the way of the Lord and His Kingdom.

So when Paul opens in v.25 he begins telling us what to take off, *“...having put away falsehood”*, which is the cloak of little lies we use to cover ourselves. Notice he says, *“HAVING done this...”* as if he expects that we are already doing this, then he says, *“speak truth...”* The Good News Bible says it with a little more punch: *“No more lying! Each of you must tell the truth...”* Then he gives the reason; because we are all together as ONE in the Body of Christ. This goes back to last week where Paul tells us to be eager to maintain the unity of the Church. Lying and deceit bring division and fighting, not unity.

I think it is interesting that after talking about lying Paul says, *“Be angry, but do not sin.”* How do you feel if you find out someone has lied to you? Lying is really a betrayal of trust and friendship. One the other side of “Stop lying” is “Stop stealing.” Both acts are divisive, and both show a disrespect for the dignity or the property of another. Either action makes us angry if the lies are about us, or if the property stolen is ours. How do we respond? From the reflex default of the old self or from the new self? As a Gentile or as a Christian? It is beginning in verse 25 that Paul begins to bounce us back and forth between the two extremes; like watching a tennis match:

v.25 *No more lies — Tell the truth* (We are all members in ONE body)

v.26 *Be angry — But do not sin* (Don’t give the Devil a chance to divide us)

v.28 *Stop stealing — Start working* (Not just for yourself, but to help others)

v.29 *Don’t use harmful words— Use helpful words* (Words that *maintain* UNITY)

v.30 *Do not make the Holy Spirit grieve — You ARE God’s Child: Guaranteed!*

The things Paul lists are things that either please God or grieve God. When I read the Psalms, I hear the Psalm writers tell us over and over of the everlasting mercy, lovingkindness and faithfulness of God toward us, and the way we humans have treated God. It is no wonder He grieves! And I think His grief is magnified because Christ has come and done all that He promised. It is *WE* who should grieve! And as if to make it even harder, what Paul says next raises the bar so high, there is no possibility we can reach it without the empowerment and enablement of the Holy Spirit Who *DOES* live in us. What Paul says next no Jew or Gentile, no other paragon of moral virtue, could ever do alone, apart from Christ.

The big shift is in 4:31 when Paul drops the *“take off—put on”* clothing metaphor and makes it real. He says: *“Take away (as in “Take out the trash”)* and he gives a list: *“bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, slander, and all the evil that goes with these things.”* Get rid of all of it. A Christian who does any of these things, or even thinks this way,

can never desire or want to maintain the unity of the body of Christ, or have any part in building the Church of Jesus Christ. A Christian who harbors these things in his heart is the same kind of Pharisee that Jesus confronted and said: "...*what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person.*" It does not just defile the person, but it defiles the Church, and a defiled Church does not attract people looking for refuge and safety—the very people God wants us to love.

Now Paul sets the bar with a humanly impossible goal. And it *HAS* to be humanly impossible, because if we could do what Paul says to do next, Christ would NOT have had to die. He could have just come and given us the advice we needed, or an instruction manual for living a good and moral life. Here it is: "*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*"(4:32) And if that was not hard enough, in the next line Paul says: "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*"(5:1) And it gets *WORSE!* (Worse in terms of hard, like *impossible* hard): "*And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*"(5:2) Remember Paul's list of the worst thing we can be in v.31? That is the kind of behavior we have to forgive, even if it makes us angry because of the harm that is done. See why Paul says: "*Be angry, but do not sin*"? We have a choice to make. Forgive or revenge. One is sin the other is not. We have to forgive the way God forgives us when He looks back on the day His Anointed One died in our place, when Jesus bore the justice for all the wrongs ever done. Now it is time for the honesty check, and this is the honor system. Only I know what is inside ME. So how far will I go in forgiving someone? How far does God go in forgiving me? How committed am I to the UNITY of the Church? How eager am I to maintain the UNITY of the Church? Paul said do not grieve God the Holy Spirit—but I think God as *Father, Son and Holy Spirit IS* grieving, and has been for centuries, yet how kind and patient He is. But Jesus said: "*When one sinner repents there is JOY in Heaven!*" I think the same thing is true when one of us forgives another person, when we offer Grace, there is rejoicing in Heaven.

The word Paul uses for forgive is actually the word *Grace* in verb form. And I like that, because being gracious, or as Paul means it, being forgiving, means more than letting someone off the hook, letting go a hurt or a cancelling a debt. Grace means offering aid, encouragement, instruction, even correction and discipline. Where do I get that? Paul said it to Titus: "*the Grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...*"(Tit 2:11-12) Grace trains us! Training arises from inside of us because, and I will say it again, God Himself lives in us. We forget this, or we do not remember it, and we need to think about this every day: *He is IN US.* "*GRACE one another, just as God in Christ has GRACED you.*" Part of that *GRACE* is to train us to be forgiving and kind and patient with one another, because that is true Godliness and self-control.

And there is one more word that Paul uses that tells us this life is not part of our human capacity. It is a word we would never notice in English, because it is like a "throw away" word: The word *BE*. That's it: *BE*. In Greek it has a rich meaning. When Paul says: "*BE kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving...*" and "*BE imitators of God, as beloved children,*" He is using a word that has the ideas of birth, creation, beginning and change. A word that means "*to possess certain characteristics, with the implication of them having been acquired and now come into existence.*"<sup>4</sup> We have acquired, that is we have been given, everything we need to grow and change, to shine

forth with God's love. And if we find God begins to work in us as we seek to live this Kingdom life, then we find we "No longer walk like the Gentiles..."(4:17), but we "Walk in love, just like Christ loved...and gave Himself...a sacrifice to God."(5:2) Or as Paul said in another place: "I call on you by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable, worshipful service to others."(Rom 12:1)

*Our Father, we present ourselves to you. Build us up in the Church and use us to serve your Church. Break our bondage of self, so that we want to do your will in every place. Take away the difficulties and the weaknesses in our lives, or even better, use those trials to help serve others, and use the weakness so that victory over them bears witness to the people we help. We ask this for your Glory and for your Kingdom. Amen*

<sup>1</sup>Louw and Nida Greek Lexicon μανθάνω ref. no. 27.15 and 32.14

<sup>2</sup>Louw and Nida Greek Lexicon διδάσκω ref. no. 33.224

<sup>3</sup>N.T. Wright "Paul's Prison Letter" Ephesians p.52

<sup>4</sup>Louw and Nida Greek Lexicon γίνομαι ref. no. 13.3