



HIS MAJESTY'S NEW CLOTHES

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 4:17-24
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The apostle Paul began the fourth chapter of his letter to the church at Ephesus by entreating the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” This morning, as we come to the second half of this chapter, the title I have chosen for this message is, “His Majesty’s New Clothes.”

My wife is always eager to dress me up with some new look. On my birthday recently, she handed me a wrapped box and said, “These are for a new look.” Inside I found a new shirt, a tie, and a pair of socks. I must have given one of those looks that didn’t need interpretation, because she immediately added, “I won’t feel bad if you want to take them back.” (How well she knows me!) So I took them back to the store and exchanged them. I like the old me (especially when I saw the bill!). While I was in the store, I saw all the new fashions for spring. Isn’t it amazing how the fashion industry gets away with changing everything people wear, as if by decree? I found myself browsing through all the new styles and colors, and it wasn’t long before I had chosen a new shirt and tie. (When I got home, I discovered I had spent more than my wife had, without the socks!)

New fashions, of course, tug at our hearts, because deep down most of us are dissatisfied with the old “me.” The Bible says that this sense of dissatisfaction and our need to cover ourselves finds its roots in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve had sinned, their shame led them to clothe themselves with fig leaves and hide from God. But God had a better plan for them. He exchanged their fig leaves for fur coats. God beautifully clothed them with the sacrificial skins of innocent animals so that they could walk with him once more in purity and acceptance.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament God is depicted as a fashion designer who gives new clothes to his people. Exodus 39 has a description of the beautiful clothes which he designed for the High Priest. The priest dressed in costly linens of blue, purple and scarlet; his breastplate was made of 12 precious stones; and his robe was detailed woven work all in blue. “Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness,” wrote the psalmist (Psalm 132:9). These garments were given to inculcate in the Hebrew mind the notion of godly character for God’s new humanity which he would establish through Israel, recovering what Adam and Eve had lost.

Isaiah described in these words the clothes that the LORD would wear when he brought about salvation for his people,

“And He put on righteousness like a breastplate,
And a helmet of salvation on His head;
And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.” (Isaiah 59:17)

We learn later in Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah had the same wardrobe:

“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,

He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.” (61:10)

In our passage this morning, Paul tells Christians that through the work of Christ, we have the supreme honor of wearing his majesty’s clothes. His costly new royal garments are ours to wear too. In the first century converts were clothed in new white garments when they were baptized, symbolizing this new purity. This symbolism was as important to the convert as a white wedding dress, symbolizing virginity, is to a bride today. Since Christians have these new royal garments, says Paul, we should take care to wear them on every occasion.

The apostle gives three motivations to the Ephesians to put on their new clothes and walk in newness of life. First, in verses 17-19, he reminds them of the old walk that came naturally to them.

I. The Old Walk That Came Naturally 4:17-19

Therefore this I say, and testify in the Lord, that you walk no longer as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; who, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

The apostle was grieved that some who had taken a vow of allegiance to Christ at baptism still continued to walk like unbelievers. The word “testify” illustrates the seriousness of what Paul is saying. He summoned the Ephesians into a holy courtroom, indicating that what he wrote would be used as evidence for or against Christians on the day of judgment. There are no other options open to Christians. We have to wear our new garments. Paul “testifies” to this in the Lord.

Paul then reminds the Christians of Ephesus about the nature of their old walk so as to motivate them to walk in a new way of life.

(a) A Futile Road: Darkened Minds

The first characteristic of their old way of life was that it was a dark road. “...that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding...” The dark road which they followed in the past always ended up in futility. No matter how much they gave their minds to logic and reason, ethical futility was the end result.

Isn’t this the mark of the world today? Paul traveled to Athens, the center of Greek philosophy, but he had little impact for Christ in that place. Luke commented on the pastime of the Athenians, “All the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new (lit., newer)” (Acts 17:21). Their speculative reasoning could not free them from idolatry. Their great learning ended in futility because it lacked the light of reality. I am reminded of our own Bay Area. Despite our fine universities and the great minds that surround us, people continually fall for the futility of the darkened mind which lacks the light of reality.

The road which the Ephesians walked was a dark road. And secondly, it was a hard road.

(b) A Hard Road: Calloused Hearts

They were "...excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart..." The tragedy of the old life was that although they lived in God's own world they were strangers on earth, isolated, their hearts unresponsive to the Creator. And the farther they walked down that road, the less capable they were of feelings and emotions; their hearts had become calloused

The road they were on was a futile, hard road. And it was a dead-end road.

(c) A Dead End Road: Enslaved Wills

"...have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." The Ephesians had presented themselves to the idol of pleasure. They were early followers of our modern-day pleasure seekers whose philosophy is, "if it feels good, do it." Tragically, that road always ends up in addiction. One seemingly insignificant choice had led to a habit ("practice" is the word Paul uses). People no longer made choices because they wanted to, but because they had to. Then their practices escalated ("every kind of impurity"), until they found themselves doing things they never thought possible. They began to practice, in John Stott's term, "unblushing obscenity."

Last Sunday's newspaper had an example of unblushing obscenity. Apparently, a newly released pornographic film is geared especially for women. Women find pornography too sleazy, the article said. It continued, "Isn't it too bad there's no visual erotica for women...Strong women, tender guys need lust too...it's a kinder, gentler pornography." The actress who played in the film is a 47-year-old graduate from Berkeley, the mother of two teenagers. Over 600 copies of the video were sold in San Jose alone. Today, it seems no one, not even housewives, is safe from sensuality, from the "practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

But that old road, which seemed so promising at the beginning, always ends "with greediness." It never satisfies. It is a dead-end road, one that leads only to frustration. If we continue to walk on it, we will lose our royal garments and end up like naked beasts.

Paul wrote these warnings so that we will never forget the road on which we once walked — a futile, hard, dead-end road. We walked with darkened minds, hard hearts, and a sense recklessness with regard to our own lives.

The apostle gives a second motivation: the love of Christ which has made available a new road to walk on.

II. The New Walk That Is Learned 4:20,21

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, just as the truth is in Jesus...

The Ephesians had learned a new walk through the work of Christ. The old way came naturally to them, but this new walk had to be learned. It required an instructor to teach it, and discipline and work on their part to learn it.

(a) The Voice of Instruction

Paul says that as the Ephesians walked down that dead-end road they heard the voice of Christ. Like Adam, they were walking on the old road when they heard the voice of God. Adam hid amidst the trees in the garden because he was ashamed. Into that

setting, however, the voice of God came, saying, "Adam, where are you?" Despite his sin, God did not leave him to continue walking on that dead-end road. He sought him and found him. Paul himself was living recklessly before he heard the voice of God on the Damascus Road. His hardened heart and darkened mind were leading him down the road of destruction, but then he heard Jesus say to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). The Ephesians were living in subjection to the sensuous spell of the goddess Artemas, but then through the preaching of the apostle they heard the voice of the living Christ.

Throughout the centuries, every time Christ is preached his voice is heard again. The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, heard the gospel preached when he was a boy, and this was how Christ reached him. Laboring under great conviction of sin, the young Spurgeon was making his way to church one Sunday morning when a blizzard hit. He could go no further, so he turned into a little Primitive Methodist Chapel where there were but 12 or 15 people attending. Describing the scene, Spurgeon wrote in his autobiography,

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now it is well that preachers should be instructed, but this man was utterly ignorant. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was, "*Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*" He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: "My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pain. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.'" "Ay!" said he, in broad Essex, "many of ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there...Look unto Me, to Christ. Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I dare say, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "And you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved...you have nothing to do but look and live." I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun... (C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Volume 1, The Early Years* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth] 87-88).

The great Spurgeon came to Christ through the unsophisticat-

ed preaching of a man who simply said, “Look unto Christ.”

We, too, if we have come to faith, if we have looked unto Christ, have heard his voice.

And Christ has graciously shown us the way of instruction.

(b) The Way of Instruction

“...heard Him and been taught in [or “by”] Him...” After Adam and Eve had come out from hiding in response to the voice of God, they discovered that their clothes were inadequate. God made new garments for them, however, and he began to teach them to walk in a new way. From now on they would walk blamelessly before him.

In Genesis we read that “God walked with Adam” in the Garden of Eden. God walked alongside him in order to teach him, in effect. What this text in Ephesians is saying is that the Garden of Eden has been recreated in the church. In the church, Christ descends to walk with us and teach us. This is what he did for Paul. He took him into the wilderness and there for 10 years privately instructed him how he should walk. So too, Christ invites us to come out of hiding to teach us through his word and through the gifts of the church to walk in newness of life.

And Christ, says the apostle, is the only instructor.

(c) The Only Instructor

“...just as the truth is in Jesus...” When Jesus instructs us to “walk no longer as the Gentiles walk,” his teaching has a ring of reality about it. When he says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to Father but by me,” you can entrust your life to his words. No other teacher or no other teaching can compare with the truth as it is in Jesus.

If the pain you suffered while you were walking on the old road was not enough to motivate you, then the love of Christ who intervened, who tenderly spoke to you to save you from destruction, will do it.

We come now to Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians on how to put off their old clothes and put on their new wardrobe. He gives these in principle in verses 22-24; and then, in verses 25-32 (which we will take in our next study), he lists them in practice.

III. The New Walk In Principle: A New Wardrobe 4:22-24

...taught by Him...to put off, in reference to your former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man, created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The apostle gives three specific instructions in these verses.

(a) Take Off the Old Man (like clothing)

Though the power of sin had been broken through the cross of Christ, the Ephesians still carried sin around with them in their bodies. And this sin would remain with them until the day they died.

Paul lists the characteristics of this “old man.” First of all, he is “old,” as his description clearly states. He has been around a long time. And he carries with him all the old sinful habits and their associations, memories and moods that lead believers into sinful habits. When we put him on, it feels natural, just as our old clothes feel comfortable when we put them on. Paul is clear-

ly implying that passivity in the Christian life is always a formula for disaster. Our natural drift is negative, so we have to “put off the old man.”

Secondly, this old man is “being corrupted with the lusts of deceit.” He never gets any better. He never learns from the past. He will forever remain misguided, naive, and vulnerable to evil.

A glance at the life of Abraham proves how true are the words of the apostle. Twice, the patriarch lied about his wife, jeopardizing his family and, of course, God’s plan for his people. On the first occasion, God intervened to deliver him, sparing him by grace. But 20 years later, Abraham repeated his sin in exactly the same circumstances, yet God delivered him once again. Had he not grown spiritually in the intervening 20 years? Of course he had. But the “old man” had not grown. He remained as corrupt as ever.

But now, in Christ, believers are free to “put off” the old man. He is, in fact, no longer our true identity for we have been joined with Christ. As we walk in Christ we have a choice to “put off” the old man and “put on” Christ. True repentance involves decisive action. So don’t just cry over your sin. Get rid of it. Put it off, through the grace of Christ.

This was what Josiah, the righteous Old Testament king, determined to do. Whenever there was an effort at reform in Israel, the kings would often tear down altars but not the high places, the sources of temptation. But in his day, Josiah broke down the pillars and ground them into dust, and he removed all the houses of the high places. In Arad today, the wall still stands which he built right through the high place so that the people would not be able to worship at the place of temptation. It is a testimony to his faithfulness.

Secondly, we must renew our way of thinking.

(b) Be Renewed In Your Thinking

“...be renewed in the spirit of your mind...” We can’t change our behavior without changing the way we think. We can’t make any significant moral changes without spiritual renewal — and renewal needs to go on all the time.

Our local Crisis Pregnancy Center is a good example of this truth. The women who minister there know that it is not enough to tell a woman with an unwanted pregnancy that abortion is murder. They know they must begin by changing her way of thinking at the deepest level. In a loving atmosphere, without coercion, they share with young mothers as much of the facts as they wish to know. Then, if they are interested, they are offered spiritual counsel, as a basis for ethical behavior. This is the basis of their appeal for ethical change. Erasmus said, “The mark of greatness is not to coerce a man but to convince a man.” Christians change through spiritual renewal. Shouted slogans won’t do it. We convince people through acts of love and kindness.

Thirdly, says Paul, we must put on the new man.

(c) Put On the New Man (like clothing)

“...to put on the new man, created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Often Christians have little moral impact on their culture because to the world we look like the fabled emperor who had no clothes. We think we have a new wardrobe, and we like to show it off. But we just look silly, because the world sees us as naked. We boldly renounce the old man, putting off immorality, homosexuality, adultery, etc., but we fail to put on an ounce of kindness, forgiveness, or forbearance. This is why we appear naked to the world. It is because we are naked! We have stripped off the old man, but we have failed

to put on the new man.

This “new man” has two characteristics. First, of course, he is new. He is “new” because he is clothed in the robes of Christ. I participated in an Orthodox wedding ceremony yesterday with two priests, one Romanian Orthodox and one Roman Catholic. When I saw the beautiful vestments of the priests, the incense, candles, crowns and crosses, etc., I felt a bit out of place. Why don’t we wear vestments? you ask. It is because we have new vestments that have been “made without hands.” We have the reality of which those beautiful vestments are but a shadow. We have Christ himself, and it is him we must put on.

Secondly, this new man has already been “created.” We are responsible to put on righteousness and holiness, but not to create it. Jesus told the lame man to walk, something the man had never been able to do before. When he looked into the face of Christ, however, and placed his faith in him, he began to walk in newness of life. This is what we do when we put on Christ. We actually enter into his life. This is not hypocrisy. We actually become united with Christ.

My daughter has been fighting an illness during the past few weeks. On successive weeks the school telephoned and asked us to take her home because she was feeling faint. On the second occasion, we kept her home the next day to rest, but that afternoon she said she had a school softball game and she wanted to play in it. A few days later she came home wearing a new softball uniform. She had been called up from JV to play in a varsity tournament. When I pointed out to her that she had not been able to get out of bed to go to school, let alone play softball, she assured me I shouldn’t worry. She not only played, she got a hit the first time she was called off the bench to bat! After the game our doctor informed us that she has mononucleosis. I thought to myself, “Mononucleosis or not, give her the uniform and she will play varsity softball!” No matter how you feel about yourself, if you put on the garments of Christ you will play varsity Christianity!

So wear these new clothes, “righteousness and holiness of the truth,” and these very things will become realities in your life.

What further motivation do we need? We have a new wardrobe, created for us and gifted to us. Let us wear it.

I will conclude by drawing three implications for this new walk in Christ.

IV. Implications of the New Walk

(a) Humility of Heart

The prophet Micah asked, “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love loyal-love and to *walk humbly* with our God” (Micah 6:8). Though we have new clothes to wear, we must never forget that the old man remains with us until the day we die. So let us be circumspect, not presumptuous, living humbly before God, knowing that we are but one step removed from all of the old patterns for living.

(b) Renewal of Mind

Micah had a vision of a great day that was coming: “On that day many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will *teach* us his ways, so that we may *walk* in his paths” (Micah 4:2). That day has dawned. Christ is in our midst, teaching us from the New City to walk in his ways. Yet the tragedy is that of all generations of Christians, we have remained babes in our thinking. We are satisfied with a diet of Christian junk food. We don’t take time to meditate, to read the Scriptures, to study the great doctrines of the faith. We need to be diligent in our walk. Never has our world been more needy. So let us avail ourselves of opportunities to learn of Christ and in the process renew our minds continually.

(c) Freedom in Walk

Let us never again be subject to the yoke of slavery which Christ broke through his death and resurrection. The Lord said to Moses at Mt. Sinai, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high” (Lev. 26:13). This same God has delivered us, just as he delivered the Israelites. We should wear our new-found freedom proudly.

Yesterday at the Orthodox wedding which I spoke of I was struck by the beauty of the young Romanian bride as she walked down the aisle. Her white gown was a statement of her purity and devotion to her husband to be. Making the day even more special was the fact that she herself had led him to Christ. She walked with head erect, her eyes radiant. Can there be anything more beautiful than the sight of a bride in all her purity and innocence? If she is not hesitant to display the beauty of her purity on the public stage, why should we hesitate to hold our heads high, proudly displaying our wedding garments, our new clothes which Jesus purchased with his own blood?

O Bride of Christ, wear your new clothes!

Amen.

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