**Exhort One Another**

Ephesians 4:17-32

How many of you had a **ratty old T-shirt** that you really loved but one day you realized you had to throw it away? Ok, you didn’t realize it and you still don’t really accept the decision - but your wife made you throw it away because it was falling apart and had just gotten really gross…

Ecclesiastes reminds us there is “a time to keep and a time to throw away.” Here in Ephesians 4 Paul is talking about more than just some old clothing. He is talking about an entire identity and way of life. And he says to a group of new Christians, ***it’s time to grow up and throw away that old stuff*** - I don’t care how much you were into Metallica or Bob Marley or Dr. Dre - it’s time to grow into the new stuff.

As a friend’s mom told a group of us who were all sweaty basketball players, ***“Dress for where you’re going, not for where you’ve been.”*** If you want to get that first real job, you can’t show up wearing gym shorts and a T-shirt. You need to go take a shower and put on some actual pants and a shirt with buttons. (For some of us these were revolutionary new ideas.)

Paul’s instructions are very clear and memorable:

“Put off your old self… and put on the new self…” Ephesians 4:22,24

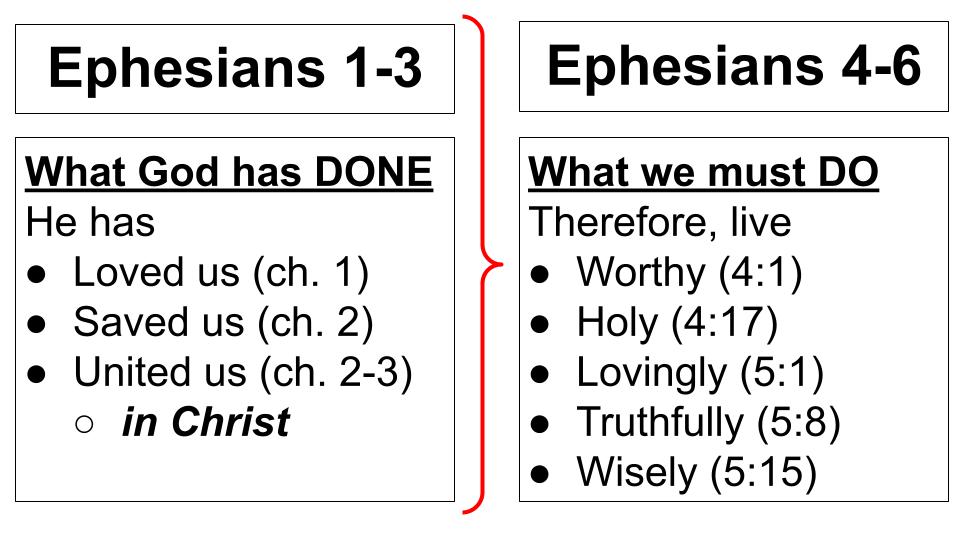
Put off and put on. Seems very simple, like changing clothes. ***But some parts of our old identity, old thinking and old lifestyle don’t come off easily.*** They stick to us (like sweaty basketball clothes) and we cling to them (like relics of our past glory). So Paul shows us how to go about this life-changing process. It’s about thinking and acting - we have to put off our old ways of thinking and acting and put on the new ways of Jesus in terms of our thinking and acting. First, put off the old self. It’s time to toss that old T-shirt. It’s just not YOU anymore.

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Understand and reject your sinful **Thinking**

“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.” Eph. 4:17

Paul writes with the authority of Jesus, testifying “in the Lord” with this exhortation. **YOU MUST** no longer walk in your old, sinful, worldly ways. The gospel MUST change your lifestyle. This is the second “therefore, live.”



Last week we saw the first one in verse 1, “therefore walk WORTHY of the call to which you have been called.” Here we see the command to walk HOLY. ***Based on what God has done for us in Christ***, based on the gospel, we must live differently. As those who have been loved, we must live in love. As those who have been forgiven, we must forgive. As those who have been reconciled to God and united with Christ, we must walk in unity. As those who have been rescued from this dark and dying world we must live in truth and wisdom, as children of the light.

Feel the force of this - you MUST no longer walk the way you used to.

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Understand and reject your sinful **Thinking**

“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.” Eph. 4:17

The word “Gentiles” here means ***pagan barbarians; godless tree-worshipers***. The early church was mostly Jewish but more and more Gentiles were getting saved as Paul led them to preach the good news to everyone who would listen. So the increasingly mixed Jew-Gentile church had to figure out how to live TOGETHER. And Galatians and Ephesians make it clear that was not easy.

***The Jews had centuries of traditions and cultural practices*** that made them who they were. They dressed a certain way, talked a certain way, ate a certain way, celebrated multiple annual festivals in very specific ways. Their identity and thoughts and lifestyle were developed entirely in contrast to their Gentile neighbors who were godless and disgusting idolatrous, immoral wretches. Oh, the Jews slept around and lied and cheated each other - but they did it under the guise of being good, Law-keeping civilized JEWS.

It has been proven that everyone develops an identity partly, if not mostly, **by defining who you ARE NOT**. I’m not a jock, I’m a nerd. I’m not a greedy conservative, I’m a free-thinking liberal. I’m not overweight, I’m thin and fit and pretty. I’m not thin and fit anymore but I’m a successful business person so my looks don’t matter.

The Jews had generation upon generation of **establishing themselves as NOT Gentiles** and certainly not Samaritans (who were half Jew and half Gentile - so they were compromisers). Paul is exhorting Jew and Gentile alike to embrace ***a new identity in Christ*** and intentionally distance themselves from the sinful, immoral ways of the first century Roman Empire. Turns out, it was a lot like 21st century America - just without the internet.

The first thing Paul points out about the old YOU to reject has to do with thinking - “the futility of their minds.”

Recognize the **OLD YOU**, in sin

* Understand and reject your sinful **Thinking**

“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them…” Ephesians 4:18

These are strong words: futility, darkness, alienation, ignorance. Is that how you understand your life before Jesus? Is that how you see the non-Christian world today? It explains a lot, doesn’t it?

* How can people ***slaughter unborn babies*** by the millions and call it “reproductive healthcare”?
* How can people ***celebrate the mutilation of their bodies*** and the sterilization of young teenagers in the name of “gender inclusivism” and avoiding all discrimination?
* How can people support the multi-TRILLION dollar ***industry of pornography***, that still makes up over half of the internet, knowing that the majority of the people involved are bought and sold as modern day slaves?
* How can we “unwittingly” support ***child labor and slave labor*** in order to buy things as cheaply as possible?

You don’t have to look far to **see the darkness** of thinking, the futility and despair, the alienation from the life of God.

Recognize the **OLD YOU**, in sin

* Understand and reject your sinful **Thinking**

“The ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous…” Eph. 4:18-19

This darkened, corrupted thinking comes from the heart - from cold, selfish, hard hearts that have grown ***calloused against morality and truth***. Romans 1 describes the downward spiral of rejecting God and His revelation and being handed over by Him into ever increasing confusion and depravity.

It’s easy to sit here on our high horse and judge our disgusting world. ***But do we see the sinfulness in OUR OWN hearts and minds?*** Do you understand your old patterns of thinking so you can fight them and replace them?

* Understand and reject your sinful **Thinking**
* Beliefs > Values > Desires > Thoughts > Actions > Lifestyle

“The ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous…” Eph. 4:18-19

A sinful lifestyle doesn’t just pop up out of nothing - it grows from a worldly, selfish, sinful heart. Underneath everything, we think and do are deeply held ***beliefs, values and desires***. Let’s take just two examples so I can equally pick on men and women: **sports and shopping**. Ladies, if you like sports and guys, if you like shopping, just reverse the stereotype. You’ll see pretty quickly that this applies beyond sports and shopping to any habit or addiction.

Consider the person who loves **football**, for example. Probably he grew up playing the game and for a while might have had dreams of playing professionally. But at some point, that boy, who is now a man, developed the **BELIEF** that football can make you happy. More than likely, he learned that belief from his dad who seemed to very deeply hold that conviction. The belief in football grew into **values** and priorities. Time and money, blood and sweat and tears were invested in the game. Hours watching games, analyzing mistakes and opportunities.

Over time, beliefs and values grew into **desires and thoughts**. The boy began to really WANT to win, to long to hear the roar of the crowd. He was crushed by failures and puffed up by victories, so he pressed on. He’s playing every day, watching ESPN, thinking about football, talking about football - his friends all play and talk about it, his parents reinforce it. By the time this kid graduates from high school ***the religion of football is deep in his heart.*** He takes these beliefs and values and desires and thoughts to college and into his marriage. One day his wife looks at him there on the couch and wonders how he can stare at that screen all day Saturday.

The answer is simple. ***He believes in football.*** He believes it can make him happy.

**Flip it to shopping**. There is a young girl in 1st or 2nd grade. She gets a new pair of shoes and that pretty girl she looks up to compliments her on the shoes. She gets a new pair of pants, and the popular boy seems to notice her more on the playground. Over time, probably influenced heavily by Mom, she develops ***a belief in FASHION***. This will make me happy. This is what matters. People will like me if I look a certain way, if I dress a certain way.

***Beliefs grow into values and priorities and reinforce each other.*** Now the girl is in middle school, and she can tell the difference between the girls who work on their appearance and try to dress nicely and the “nerds” who for some reason “don’t care.” She doesn’t want to be left behind, so she tells Mom about the latest trends, which she reads about and thinks about and talks about. Most of her friends look and dress just like her so their beliefs and priorities reinforce each other.

By the time this girl graduates from high school **the religion of APPEARANCE** is rooted deeply in her heart. She believes that looking good is the way to be happy and loved and accepted. Both guys and girls and celebrities seem to very visibly agree with this. And she wants that acceptance. She longs for it. She’s been wounded a few times, feeling the sting of rejection and judgment. So, she desperately wants to avoid that and experience the rush of being looked at and admired.

Fast forward and you have a ***mother of three*** who feels disgusted with herself every day that she looks in the mirror. Her credit cards are maxed out trying to make her Mom bod look like her teen bod, and she wonders why she never feels truly happy. The answer is simple. ***She believes in the religion of appearance.*** She drank the Kool-Aid that skinny equals VALUABLE, loveable, happy.

Think about it. ***What are today’s temples for worship?*** The stadium, the gym and the mall. This is where modern Americans worship because ***they believe that is where happiness will be found.*** They believe it so they prioritize it. They want it and they think about it and before long it becomes who they are and defines their lives.

Let’s be honest here. ***WE believe it too, don’t we?*** We look down our noses at those GENTILE SINNERS but secretly we also believe in the GLORY of winning and the happiness of looking good. Secretly we want that attention and affirmation as much as they do - maybe more because we know we can’t have it.

Ok, all of that was part 1A. We need to get to part two. But we can’t effectively PUT ON Christ and our new identity and new life if we don’t first recognize what we have to PUT OFF. ***Are you familiar with your old, sinful self?*** Do you know how that devious monster lies and hides? We absolutely should not focus on sin but we do need to be aware of our tendencies and weaknesses so we can actively reject and uproot those false beliefs, sinful values and worldly desires.

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Repent and **Replace** your sinful behaviors

“They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” Ephesians 4:19

**Sin is like a fire that CONSUMES people**. They give themselves up to the gods of football and fashion, of lust and greed, of power and money - and those gods consume them. In ancient times people literally sacrificed their children to pagan gods in the hope that those gods would give them rain and a good crop and protect them from invasion and disasters. They slit their little boy’s throat and burned him on an altar in the name of some local deity.

As we dress our kids up for “the big game” or the big dance, ***it doesn’t LOOK to us like child sacrifice, but it is.*** We are laying our kids on the altar of football and fashion, of money and greed, of success and power. We are teaching them how to gain the whole world - and in the process they are forfeiting their souls.

Instead, we need to **show them the BETTER WAY** - the Jesus way. All other gods, all other ways will disappoint us and eventually destroy us. So we need to learn to identify their subtle and deceptive messages so we can reject that thinking and replace those behaviors.

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Repent and **Replace** your sinful behaviors

“You were taught in him… to put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life.” Ephesians 4:22

Here is the key command: **PUT OFF your old self**. Throw it away. Tear it off. Rip it up. Lay THAT on the altar of your worship. Present your body as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Put to death the misdeeds of your body, your sinful flesh as Paul calls it.

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Repent and **Replace** your sinful behaviors

“Put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” Ephesians 4:22

Your old way of life is not just sinful it is ***DECEITFUL***. That means it will HIDE from you. You will struggle to see it. **This is why we need each other** to effectively put off the old self. On your own you will not be good at this, at least not for long.

Just as **sin is a group delusion**, with friends leading friends increasingly astray, so is righteousness. ***It is a group VISION*** - finally seeing the truth and helping each other to walk in it. Look back at v. 21:

Recognize the **Old You**, in sin

* Repent and **Replace** your sinful behaviors

“Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Ephesians 4:21

This is ***a letter to a CHURCH*** - a gathering of believers. Fundamentally this whole letter is an exhortation to this group of Christians to help each other LIVE LIKE CHRISTIANS. It’s a call for UNITY and love. You’ll see that all the sins Paul describes, and all the replacement acts of righteousness, are RELATIONAL in nature.

So, let’s commit to putting OFF our old selves. ***Let’s commit to helping each other see reality and explore the heart.*** Not with an attitude of judgment and “holier than thou” but with the humble posture of “one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread.” The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all recovering sinners here. ***There are no righteous people here.*** They must have found another church. We are all sinners saved by grace. And that grace is CHANGING US!

Recognizing what we have been **saved FROM**, we now get to work on what we have been saved FOR. We put off the old self so we can PUT ON the new self.

Grow into the **New You**, in Christ

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*

“Be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self.” Eph. 4:23-24

Verses like this show us that this is a **CORPORATE passage** - for a group of believers, not just individuals. If we are going to really put off the old nature, we need other believers helping us. And if we are going to really put on the new nature, we need brothers and sisters praying for us, walking with us, encouraging and exhorting us.

Paul doesn’t say to just one person “be renewed in the spirit of your MIND,” he says to the group: “Be renewed in your **MINDS.” Plural.** Together. This is a corporate exercise as much as it is an individual exercise. And it starts in the heart and mind. It’s an internal battle before an external one. We have to dig down into our thoughts and desires, our beliefs and values. That’s the “spirit of your mind,” - the INNER YOU. The real you.

Paul shares **three gospel truths** here to renew our minds and help us understand the new people God is making us in Christ.

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*
  + You are a new **Creation** in Christ

“Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:24

This was the first three chapters of Ephesians. You WERE dead in your sins, ***but God made you alive together with Christ***. He raised you from the dead in Christ and seated you with Him in the heavenly realms. **You are NEW**. You are not the same person you used to be. That old, selfish, sinful, worldly person died and was buried with Jesus. And a new person was born at the moment you called on Jesus in faith.

***The caterpillar is gone and you became a butterfly.*** So stop crawling around in the dirt. It is your birthright to FLY. “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, she is a new creation - the old has gone, the new has come.” You are no longer a sinner, now you are a SAINT - a holy one. God re-created you in TRUE righteousness and holiness. Not only have you been declared righteous in Christ, God is committed to making you righteous.

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*
  + You were **Sealed** by the Spirit

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the Day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30

The image here is of ***an official letter with the signet ring seal of the King.*** You see that insignia, you know it’s HIS. The Holy Spirit placed His stamp on your heart the moment you first believed. He came into your heart as a down payment, a deposit confirming the full inheritance that will be yours on the Day Jesus returns and restores all things.

Not only did Jesus die for you to pay for your sins, **He MARKED YOU** as belonging to Him. He set you apart and sent His own Spirit to be with you, to comfort and strengthen and empower you. ***So LISTEN TO HIM!*** Don’t resist and grieve the Holy Spirit. Don’t go back to your old ways and harden your heart. Just as you need to know the temptations and lies of your flesh, even more you need to know the still small voice of the Holy Spirit as He convicts you of sin and leads you into righteousness.

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*
  + You are part of the **Body** of Christ

“Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” Ephesians 4:25

This is the main thrust of Ephesians, - the unity of the church. Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and **made us all ONE in Himself**. There is no more Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor - we are all equal in our total dependence on Jesus. And as those who have been united with Jesus by faith we are, as a result, united with each other in His body. ***We are MEMBERS of one another.*** You may be a finger and I’m a tendon; he may be an eye and she’s the big toe - but we are as inseparable as the parts of a body.

This is how we help each other renew our minds - by studying and discussing, singing and celebrating, praying and applying THE TRUTH of who we are in Christ.

Grow into the **New You**, in Christ

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*
* Beliefs > Values > Desires > Thoughts > Actions > Lifestyle

“Be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self…” Eph. 4:23-24

We need to **let our BELIEF in the gospel grow into values** and priorities of knowing Jesus and loving Him. We need to let those convictions and disciplines come to dominate our desires and thoughts. Then our hearts and minds will bear the fruit of the Spirit in our actions and lifestyle. Then we will grow up into Jesus. Then we will become who He died for us to become.

Do you really, ***deeply believe that ONLY JESUS can truly make you happy***? Deep in the spirit of your mind do you hold this conviction that Jesus IS the pearl of great price; He IS the treasure in the field? That He is worth trading EVERYTHING for?

That is the seed kernel of the gospel: Jesus is worth it. Jesus is LORD. He is everything. ***From that belief grow values*** - like Bible reading, prayer, worship attendance, small group involvement. Those values and priorities in your life begin to shape your desires. At first you may not enjoy reading the Bible and praying, but over time - as you fan the flames of your beliefs - you will come to enjoy your time with the Lord not just for how it makes you feel but because you truly know and love HIM. You will come to truly DELIGHT in Jesus above all things. And He will increasingly fill your thoughts so that “pray without ceasing” is as natural as it used to be to “think about football or girls” or to think about shopping and boys.

Those thoughts become actions and those actions over time become a lifestyle.

The football and shopping example shows this progression that works for the devil also works for Jesus. **But WE have to work it** - and we have to work it together. In recovery we use that phrase, “It works if you work it.” Another truth is that “It works if WE work it.”

We need each other. Don’t kid yourself that you can manage just fine on your own.

What would you ***tell your teenage son or daughter*** when you just moved to a new city? You’re fine on your own. You don’t need any friends. Or just wait and see who you run into in this huge public school. It’ll be fine.

No way! You would ***coach your young teen*** about how important it is to choose your friends carefully and wisely. Don’t fall into the wrong crowd because they will lead you into all kinds of trouble. And don’t go it alone. You need a youth group. You need Christian friends who are encouraging you and praying for you. You need some other positive adults who say the same things we do at home.

You may think you’ve outgrown the need for good Christian friends but the truth is we all need one or two really good friends to encourage us and help us know and love and serve God. ***Growth is a group project.***

And it starts with our hearts and minds - helping to renew each other ON THE INSIDE.

Grow into the **New You**, in Christ

* Renew your mind with the **Truth** *together*

“Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:24

As we saw earlier, ***Paul appeals to the gospel reality*** that you are a new creation in Christ. You have been re-made into God’s own likeness, with the Holy Spirit of God now living in you, bringing with Him true righteousness and holiness.

**So PUT THAT ON**. Every day. You get dressed every day - I hope. You don’t wear the same thing one day after another. So each morning when you get dressed think about how you are dressing SPIRITUALLY. What are you filling your heart and mind with each day? Put off the old you and put on the new you. That starts with new ways of thinking and it grows into new ways of acting.

Grow into the **New You**, in Christ

* Cultivate new **Practices** *together*

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.” Ephesians 4:25

From here Paul goes into ***a list of exhortations about behavior IN RELATIONSHPS***. There are six of these and we don’t have time to unpack them all but read over the whole chapter this week and see how it flows and builds toward this application.

A new identity and renewed mind will grow into a new lifestyle. But not automatically. That’s where effort comes in. That’s ***where good relationships come in***. Remember what you would say to your teenager, or what your parents said to you when you were a teenager. Your friends matter. You will become like them; for better or for worse.

Part of putting off the old self and putting on your new self is a commitment to actually live differently. Your relationship with Christ started this way with that thing called **REPENTANCE**. You had to turn from your old self and old way of life, confessing it as sin and turning to Jesus to save you from it. Part of growing in Christ is continuing in a LIFE of repentance: every day choosing to put off your old ways and put on JESUS’ ways.

This doesn’t just mean “don’t tell lies,” it means ***live a life of honesty*** and truthfulness. Live a life of integrity. Don’t compromise. Don’t conceal parts of yourself. Be real. Be authentic. This commitment alone would totally change our small groups, right?

Remember that silly ***Jim Carey movie Liar Liar*** where he suddenly HAD TO tell the whole truth and the real truth every time, all the time? It was funny precisely because it’s what we don’t do. We all conceal things, at least a little.

Next time someone asks, “How are you?” Probably in about 7.5 minutes - you’ll be tested. Will you actually obey Scripture and put off falsehood and speak the truth to your neighbor? Next time you’re in small group and they ask, “How can we pray for you?” Don’t you dare say, “I’m good. No prayer needed.” Errr. False. Liar. Put off the old self that hid the truth and dare to be real.

That’s what this series is about - **connecting**. And connecting cannot happen if we aren’t honest with each other. No doubt that’s why Paul put it first in his list.

* Cultivate new **Practices** *together*
  + Speak the Truth (v. 25)
  + Make Peace (v. 26-27)
  + Work hard (v. 28a)
  + Give Generously (v. 28b)
  + Speak in love (v. 29)
  + Be quick to Forgive (v. 31-32)

Here are the other five exhortations. The key thing here is to **REPLACE old habits** with new ones. You can’t STOP a habit. You have to replace it. Replace falsehood with truth-telling. Replace anger and resentment with peace-making. Replace laziness and theft with hard work and generosity. Replace harsh words with kind words - stop with the tear downs and cold pricklies and use build ups and warm fuzzies. And replace harshness and conflict with forgiveness and love.

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 5:32

What a perfect summary statement on which to close. Why should we forgive each other? **Because God forgave us IN CHRIST**. We have been so loved, so cherished, so blessed in Christ that if we can’t share a little grace with one another, it makes God shake His head and wonder if we get it at all.

Put off your old self. Put on the new self. ***Jesus took that old, selfish, angry, sinful YOU*** and nailed it to the cross with him. Then Jesus rose from the dead and gave you a brand new heart and life, united with Him.

You may have loved that ratty old T-shirt. ***But it’s time to let it go.*** That’s not you anymore. Dress for where you’re going, not for where you’ve been. Put off so you can put on.

Let’s encourage each other with these words! Let’s help each other grow more and more up into Christ!

Let’s pray.