



So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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 (Ephesians 4:17–24).

The kind of clothes we wear often depends on the kind of role we're fulfilling. If you're in the army, you wear the uniform. If you're going to a formal event you put on a tuxedo or an evening gown. Even if you're going to prison, you get some new clothes. There's always been this custom for people to adapt their dress to suit an occasion or a role.

Next Saturday my daughter Kimberly is getting married. As her father, I've seen Kim in a lot of roles. Most of the time she hangs out in jeans or sweats. But when she played soccer in college she wore a crimson and black uniform. Now she's a nurse and when she goes to work she puts on her scrubs. But next Saturday she'll put off all those clothes and put on a wedding dress. She'll probably only wear it once, but putting that dress on and wearing it as she walks down that aisle will always symbolize a change in her life. From that day on, she'll be a married woman with a new name and a new role.

The Christian life is like that. When we placed our trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we stripped off one set of clothes (the old self) and put on another (the new self). That new set of clothes will forever define us as belonging to him. Our new life in Christ means new clothing, and new clothing means an entirely new role; a new way of living.

This is what Paul is telling us in this passage: when you become a Christian, you become a new person; a new creation; you take on not just a new role but a new identity. Everything changes. You're headed in a new direction. You were on one path, now you're on another. Your life used to look like this, now it looks

very different. You simply can't continue to live the way you used to live.

For Paul, this wasn't a small matter. That's why he starts with a great sense of urgency and authority. He says, "*So I tell you this, and insist on this in the Lord.*" Paul wants to grab us by the collar and pin us to the wall and say, "This isn't an optional deal. This is a mandate from the Lord Jesus himself." If you're really a follower of Christ, you have to walk a different path than the world around you. You have to wear different clothes.

A Description of the Old Wardrobe.

In verses 17–19 he describes the way we used to live. He says this is the way the Gentiles live. This was his way of saying that this is how people live apart from Christ. This is how the world lives. This is how you once lived. This is the life you must **not** go back to. He describes this old life, this old wardrobe in three ways.

A darkened mind

First of all, there's a darkened mind. He doesn't start with what a person does; he starts with how they think. When he describes this old way of life he talks about "*the futility of their thinking.*" He says they were "*darkened in their understanding.*" He mentions "*the ignorance that is in them.*" It's interesting, isn't it, how all these things refer to our minds; our way of thinking; our capacity to understand. We're not talking here about what we call intellect or intelligence. There are many people who have brilliant minds: scientists, writers, mathematicians, scholars. That's not what this is about. This is about an inability to grasp what really matters. It's about the underlying assumptions a person has about life. It's about a person's view of reality. This is why, as we all know, the most brilliant people can sometimes be utter failures in human relationships, morally debased, or just miserable.

There are all kinds of ways we see this futile, ignorant, darkened thinking today. We see it in a philosophy so prevalent in our society that says the most important thing in life is to be happy. It says I'm not ruled or accountable to anyone or anything except myself. So if something makes me unhappy, I have an obligation to get rid of it. Part of the thinking here is there's really no absolute truth. We don't pursue things because they're right or wrong but because they work for us; they satisfy us; they make us happy. I even hear this kind of thinking spiritualized when we say, "Well, God wants me happy. So he'll support whatever I do to become happy." That kind of thinking is futility. When we

think that way, we've lost touch with reality and we find ourselves justifying things that God deplotes.

We see it also in those who go through life thinking somehow life has cheated them. There's this sense they deserve better than the hand they've been dealt. They spend a lot of energy blaming others for the wrongs done to them and for their sad lot in life. They become bitter and resentful, not only towards others, but towards a God they convince themselves doesn't even exist. If he does he should be held accountable for his injustice and cruelty. This, too, is futility of mind, because in fact God is good and just and merciful and we're the ones who've failed him.

A hardened heart

We wonder, how does a person get to this place where his thinking is so warped? This leads to the second thing he says about the old self at the end of v. 18. He says a darkened mind is the result of a hardened heart. The Greek word for hardening is *porosis*, which described "a stone harder than marble." Sometimes we say of someone, "He has a heart of stone." The word indicates stubbornness, a resistance to the things of God. Here's how it works. You start making small choices that aren't of God. They may seem innocent, but they're wrong. There are opportunities to change, times when God's brings conviction, but if you don't listen your heart hardens and when it's hard, there's no spiritual blood going to the brain and your mind is darkened.

I must tell you that's scary to me as a pastor. I can allow what seems to be very small compromises, what seems to be almost innocent things into my life, and little by little my heart becomes hard. And though I'm called to teach the truth of God's word I'm actually becoming darkened in my understanding. That's scary to me. If I allow into my life the things that harden my heart, and I become darkened in my own understanding, how can I share with God's people the depths of God's Word?

A shameless sensuality

But there's a third thing Paul says about the old self. A hard heart not only leads to a darkened mind but to a shameless sensuality. In v. 19 he says, "*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.*" So you get to the place where you're beyond feeling, beyond shame, and you need more and more to be satisfied. You don't even care anymore what people think so long as you can gratify your desire for more. You become like a drug user who started using in secret, but has become so desperate for more he no longer cares who knows.

I was looking at the *NY Times* bestseller list this week and I noticed a book called *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It's part of a trilogy. I'd never heard of it and so I read the review. It's basically porn and it's written by a bored soccer mom who lives in London, and everyone is reading it like it's no big deal. That's the kind of thing

Paul's talking about, and it **is** a big deal. He says, "You're no longer to live that way. That's how the world lives and you're called to be different!"

Then he goes on in the next section and describes the new set of clothes we have in Christ. In doing so he tells us both why and how to live out our new life in Christ.

A Description of the New Wardrobe.

The Jesus School

He starts in verses 20–21 and reminds them this isn't the way of life you learned. Paul uses the image of a school. I call it the Jesus School. We all know when we go to school there are at least three elements involved: a subject, a teacher, and a classroom. Paul says Jesus is all three! *He's the subject*. The NASB translates v. 20 better. It says "***But you did not learn Christ in this way.***" When you become a Christian and begin to grow you "***learn Christ.***" He's the subject! You learn about his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection on our behalf. But not only that, *Jesus is the teacher*. The first part of v. 21 literally says, "***you have heard Him.***" He's the One who teaches us. Even when the teaching is given through one of us, it's him who is speaking. But that's still not all. *Jesus is also the classroom*. He says, "***you were taught in Him even as truth is in Jesus.***" Like the classroom itself, he's the environment where the teaching takes place. When Jesus is the subject, the teacher and the environment, we can have confidence we're hearing truth because "***truth is in Jesus.***"

It's popular today to say there's no ultimate truth; to think nothing can be known for sure. That's part of the futility of the world's thinking, to think there are no final answers, no ultimate knowledge or truth. You can even find pastors who say that. But Jesus himself said, "***If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***" (Jn 8:31b, 8:32). That's what the truth always does, it sets people free. Truth, even though it's hard truth, difficult truth, is realistic. It tears away our illusions, and so it sets us free.

But what exactly is this truth that's in Jesus? What do we learn in the Jesus School?

You learned to put off the old self

First, we learned to put off the old self. He says, "***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.***" This isn't a command, it's a statement of fact. When you trusted Christ, you put off the filthy, soiled rags of your old self. Now you're to live that out in everyday life. That's not easy. When you put off the old self, you're taking off something that's become very comfortable and natural. It's like throwing away that old pair of slippers you've been wearing for 10 years. Everyone else is sick of them, but you love those slippers! They're so comfortable! It's not easy to put off the old self. It hurts.

The Puritans had an interesting word for this. They called it *mortification*. That means you put the old self to death. You can't improve your old self. That's what many people try to do. That's what religion does—it tries to fix the old self by being good, praying harder and going to church. Dallas Willard called it "sin management." But the old self will never get better. In fact, look what Paul says: It's "**being corrupted by its deceitful desires.**" He uses the present tense. You're not to put off the old self that **was** being corrupted; it **is** being corrupted. It's still being corrupted by its sinful desires.

You may be thinking, "Wait a second. I thought I am a new creature in Christ. I thought I was made new. I thought you said in Christ I was chosen, adopted, redeemed, filled with the Spirit and seated in heavenly places. I thought God looks at me and sees me as precious to himself as his own Son. Isn't that who I am?" Yes, that is who you are. But as a new creature in Christ what that means is you're able **not** to sin. Once you were **not** able **not** to sin. But now you're able to put off the old patterns. Right now you and I are righteous before God, and yet we can still be corrupted by sinful desires if we allow them to rule our lives. Don't corrupt the message of grace. Don't think that because you're a new creature in Christ, either you can't sin or your sin doesn't matter.

The encouraging thing about this is if you're struggling with sin, you're not weird; you're not alone. We all struggle still. Satan would love for you to think you're the only one. The danger of that is it forces sin underground; we hide it and keep it from one another. We become a community of Pharisees who Jesus called "whitewashed tombs." No, we can rest assured we're all fighting this battle.

You learned to be made new in your minds

The second thing we learned is "**to be made new in the attitude of your minds.**" Now we're back to our mind, our thinking. If we're going to do the next thing, which is to put on the new self, we have to be constantly allowing God to renew our minds. That means we take the truth that we learned in that Jesus School I was talking about, and we let that truth soak in our minds every day. I don't know if you make a habit of spending time each day in God's word and in conversation with God, but here's a very good reason to do that. You see, we get lied to every day. The world lies to us, the devil lies to us, and our old self lies to us. And if we don't subject those lies to the truth that's in Jesus, we'll begin to believe those lies, and that will take us down the path we already looked at. This is also why we go to church—to renew our minds. All week long, the nails of our faith come loose, but we come to church and pound the nails back in.

The song Jerome sang a few minutes ago reminds us of that. That song is about a guy renewing his mind in the truth.

*It's so easy to cash in these chips on my shoulders
So easy to loose this old tongue like a tiger
It's easy to let all this bitterness smolder
Just to hide it away like a cigarette lighter*

*It's easy to curse and to hurt and to hinder
It's easy to not have the heart to remember
That I am a priest and a prince in the Kingdom of God*

*I've got voices that scream in my head like a siren
Fears that I feel in the night when I sleep
Stupid choices I made when I played in the mire
Like a kid in the mud on some dirty blind street*

*I've got sorrow to spare, I've got loneliness too
I've got blood on these hands that hold on to the truth
That I am a priest and a prince in the Kingdom of God*

*I swore on the Bible not to tell a lie
But I've lied and lied
And I crossed my heart and I hoped to die
And I've died and died*

*But if it's true that you gathered my sin in your hand
And you cast it as far as the east is from the west
If it's true that you put on the flesh of a man
And you walked in my shoes through the shadow of death*

*If it's true that you dwell in the halls of my heart
Then I'm not just a fool with a fancy guitar
No, I am a priest and a prince in the Kingdom of God*

You learned to put on the new self

It's only when we allow God to renew our minds that we can do the third thing—"**put on the new self.**" Remember, the new self was something we received when we came to Christ. But it's also something we need to keep appropriating into our lives. My daughter will put on the wedding dress and that changes everything. Although she may never put it on again, she needs to remember that she did put it on and that was the start of a new life. That's what we're to do with our new self. We put it on at our conversion and now we need to live accordingly. Look how he describes it. The old self was being corrupted but the new self "**is created to be like God in righteousness and holiness.**" Paul says, "You're a new creation. You were created for what is holy and righteous, and you'll actually find your greatest fulfillment in that. The freedom of the gospel isn't the freedom to live like the world. It's the freedom to live in opposition to the world, and to know the joy of living holy and righteous lives. When we're

being what God made us to be, we find the greatest joy, the greatest happiness, and it's not in the way of the world.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis describes a young man tormented by a red lizard that sits on his shoulder and mocks him. The lizard represents the indwelling sin we all struggle with. An angel comes and promises to kill the red lizard as soon as the guy verbally permits him to do so. The man, for the moment, is thrilled with that idea. "I can be rid of this thing." Then he watches as the angel begins to glow with a fiery heat. If he kills the lizard he may kill him as well. He's not sure what to do.

The lizard, recognizing the struggle of the man, begins to mock and plead at the same time. He says, "Be careful. He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he will. Then you'll be without me forever. It's not natural. How could you live? He doesn't understand. It may be natural for him, but it's not for us. I'll be so good. I've gone too far in the past, but I won't do it again."

For Lewis, these words typify the way we often compromise and allow sin in our lives "It's not that big of a deal. It would be unnatural to kill it. I can deal with it on my own. I don't want to be

a legalist. God will forgive me. I won't let it go too far." With such words we allow the lizards to control us.

The man almost believes the lizard, but then he relents and begs the angel to kill it. The angel grasps the lizard and with fiery hands chokes it so it dies and falls to the ground. But when it hits the ground, something wonderful happens—it becomes a stallion, and the young man gets on it and rides. What had been the ruler is now ruled. What had been his master, he now masters.

When we kill the sin, when we put off the old self, we're freed. I think it's why Lewis chose the beautiful image of the stallion the young man can ride with a sense of power and freedom and fulfillment. It's that ride of righteousness and holiness that God intends for us.

I don't know what you're struggling with today, but I hope you'll listen to the word of God: Don't buy the world's lies and don't live as the world lives. Let your mind be renewed with the truth that's in Jesus so you can live as God created you to live, in the true freedom of holiness and righteousness.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.