

Ephesians 4:17-24

Introduction:

The analogy of clothes

“The fashion industry tries to sell us a theology of ‘new birth through clothing.’

The problem is, clothing can polish the image but not the soul. However, in Christ God offers us a divine wardrobe which really will change one's life.”

The Passage

I. The old self (v. 17-19)

A. “Separated from the life of God”

separated from relationship with God, separated from the new life he brings, the life he himself has

B. An anatomy of life without God

1. Head

-“Futility in their thinking” = vain, worthless because it doesn’t take into account the most important reality of all

-“Darkened in their understanding”

-“Ignorance that is in them”

-We need to remember that futile/darkened/ignorant thinking can come from people who are very intelligent (but who fail to acknowledge God)

2. Heart

a. “due to their hardness of heart”

“hardness of heart” = Closed off from him, refusal to submit to him out of a desire for independence and control.

b. The root problem is not an intellectual problem. It’s a heart problem

-We make fundamental heart decisions and then those decisions shape our theology/perspective on life

-When our desired behavior doesn’t match up with our beliefs, we often change our behavior or we actually change our beliefs to justify our behavior

-e.g. “Christian-kid-goes-to-college” syndrome

3. Hands

-“they become calloused”

When they’re consciences prick them, rather than listening to that, they continue in sin and become less sensitive to their conscience as a result

“They hand themselves over to sensuality/every kind of impurity”
= sin without restraint

“with a continual lust for more”

It’s never enough. They always want more and more

C. This doesn’t describe every non-Christian, but it describes the trajectory of life without God

II. The new self (v. 20-21, 24)

A. Created by God

v. 24: “created by God”: the new self is created at our new birth when we became Christians (see John 3 and Ephesians 2:10)

B. Christ is the center and pattern of this new life (v. 20-21)

C. An Anatomy of Jesus’ life

1. Heart

Not independence but total dependence on God

“I don’t seek to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

“I can’t do anything by myself. I only do what my dad does, and whatever my dad does I do that.”

2. Head

He had no reason to suppress the truth in order to justify his lifestyle, so he always saw reality as it actually is

3. Hands

He lived his life lived for God’s glory

He never grew calloused, always lived out fruit of the Spirit

D. As we learn Christ, our new self takes on his heart, head, and hands

III. Put off, put on (v. 22, 24)

A. Put off

1. Elsewhere, Paul uses a more extreme analogy: put to death (see Col 3:4, Ro 6:11, Gal 5:24)

2. So picture taking those old clothes off and nailing them to the cross and leaving them there.

B. Put on

Romans 13:14: clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ

C. This is really hard for us for many reasons

1. It can be hard for second generation Christians who did not experience a clean break from an old life and a new birth to a new life with a clear before and after

2. Old clothes are comfortable and familiar. We get so used to them; it’s hard to let them go

D. What we need in order to do this faithfully

1. Hard work and intentionality. We can’t take our faith casually but should go at it with all the intentionality and effort of an athlete (see Phil 2:12, Phil 3:12-14, Heb 12:1)

2. We need to become convinced in our hearts that new life is qualitatively better than old (that it is the life we were made for and ultimately long for)

--so often we try to be good Christians but we secretly long for another life that we think is better

--we need to remember that the life has “deceitful desires” (v. 22)

They promise us something that they can’t actually fulfill

IV. Be made new in the attitude of your minds (v. 23)

See also Romans 12:1-2

This week let’s remind ourselves of who we are in Christ: read the handout

When you take off your clothes, remind yourself you’ve taken off the old self, and when you put on clothes remember who you are in Christ

Discussion questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. In regards to the old self in v. 17-19, the connection between the heart and the head was discussed on Sunday (ie. our core heart decisions are often the root of our beliefs and perspectives). Have you seen this connection at work in your own life or your friends' lives? How have you seen that play out for good or bad?
3. On Sunday we talked about how it is hard to putt off the old self in the same way that it's hard to putt off old clothes that have become so familiar and comfortable in our lives. What are parts of the old self that have become all too familiar and comfortable in your own life?
4. As you think about the new self and clothing ourselves with Christ, what aspect of Christ do you most desire to "put on" at this point in your life?
5. In regards to "being made new in the attitude of our minds" (v. 23), what practical disciplines or practices or postures have been helpful for you in regularly transforming your mind?