

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY FIFTEEN

Here's How to Get Dressed

Ephesians 4:17–24

We come to the cross wearing our old garments, filthy as they are, and we stand before the living, all-pure, all-clean God. We claim His forgiveness, shed the old garments, and He fits us with new ones that have been created in righteousness and holiness and truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN we were dead because of our sins, God “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (Ephesians 2:5). We are alive in Christ, living proof of God’s grace, and with new life comes a new lifestyle. How strange it would be for us who are alive to act as if we were dead. Christ freed believers from sin’s grave. Why would we live like those who are still entombed?

When Lazarus came out of his tomb still bound in his burial linens, Jesus, who had raised Lazarus, exclaimed to the dumbfounded onlookers, “Unwrap him and let him go!” (John 11:44). People brought back to life don’t walk around in graveclothes! They put on new clothes and start living!

Christ tells us to do the same, to discard our old dead ways and walk in Christ’s new life-giving ways. As commentator Warren Wiersbe puts it, “Take off the graveclothes and put on the grace-clothes!”¹

How do we put off the old and put on the new? In our study of Ephesians 4:17–24, Paul helps us understand the process by first exposing the dark futility of sin, and then he describes the delight of walking with Christ. So let’s step into the apostle’s changing closet to get fitted for a new set of clothes for our new selves.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before beginning the study, pause for prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see truth in His Word. Consider this prayer of David to help prime your heart:

*I will study your commandments
and reflect on your ways.*

*I will delight in your decrees
and not forget your word.*

*Be good to your servant,
that I may live and obey your word.*

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:15–18)*

Write your own prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The context of the passage is Paul's overarching command, "lead a life worthy of your calling" (Ephesians 4:1). We live worthy of our calling first through our *unity* (4:2–16) and then *purity* (4:17–32). Just as God called us "one new people" (2:15), He also called us His "holy people" (1:18). Living as holy people requires us to exchange old behaviors for new, just as we might take off old clothes and put on new clothes.

Read *Ephesians 4:17–24* and notice in verse 20 the division of the two main sections. Verses 17–19 reveal how people live without God ("Gentiles"); verses 20–24 spotlight Jesus' life and teaching and conclude with key commands to follow.



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Remember, always integrate the section [of Scripture] you're looking at with its context. Never just plunge right into a verse. Always see where you're coming from and look at where you're going. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: The Old Wardrobe

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we look for contrasts and comparisons, cause-and-effect relationships, repetition, and similarities and opposites.² In this text, Paul contrasted the Gentiles who live without God with Jesus who is God.

According to Ephesians 4:17, what did Paul warn his readers not to do?

Paul gave reasons for his command by exposing the true nature of these people who want nothing to do with God. Let's take a closer look . . . and be warned. The harsh reality of a life trapped in sin is a disturbing picture.

The Heart of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

We begin with the source of all sin, the core of our being where our will and longings take shape. How does Paul describe the Gentiles' hearts in *Ephesians 4:18*?



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The Greek word Paul chose draws a dreadful picture of a stony and impenetrable covering like a thick callus or calcification that deadens our ability to feel. What do you think Paul was implying by this word picture?

The Mind of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

How did Paul describe the unbelievers' minds in *Ephesians 4:18*? And what does this description imply about the hopelessness of their mental state?

If our society is so advanced, why are so many people taking drugs, getting drunk, getting divorced, and battering spouses and children? Why are all these problems rising instead of declining? Great questions. It's because there is a hardness of heart and a darkness of mind which leads to a deadness of life. —Chuck Swindoll



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The Condition of the Godless—Ephesians 4:18

Because they have hardened their hearts and darkened their minds, those who shut out God are in what condition, according to *Ephesians 4:18*?

Paul has already used the word “dead” to describe this state, applying it to our own condition (Ephesians 2:1). We, too, were dead and alienated from God before Christ saved us and brought us near!

Before any of us cluck our tongues or look down our noses, remember the nature within us is just as wicked as theirs. When we act out, we walk in step with a culture that has lost its way. —Chuck Swindoll

The Lifestyle of the Godless—Ephesians 4:19

How did Paul describe the lifestyle of unbelievers in *Ephesians 4:19*?

Look at the tawdry fashions that line the spiritual closets of those who live without God: insensibility, immorality, degradation, grasping greed. It's a shocking parade of iniquity—and we have witnessed it on our television screens, in our movies, and even in ourselves.



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Commentator William Barclay summed up Paul's view of souls trapped in sin:

He saw men's hearts so petrified that they were not even aware that they were sinning; he saw men so dominated by sin that shame was lost and decency forgotten; he saw men so much at the mercy of their desires that they did not care whose life they injured and whose innocence they destroyed so long as these desires were satisfied. These are exactly the sins of the Christless world today, sins that can be seen invading life at every point and stalking the streets of every great city.³

Thankfully, Christ models a new way to dress, and these spiritual clothes are ours for the choosing.



Interpretation: A Change of Wardrobe

In contrast to the sinful deeds of the godless, Paul wrote about the person of Christ. Read the following verses in which Paul reveals our primary motivation for changing our “wardrobe.”

But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. (Ephesians 4:20–22)

Why do you think he focused on Christ here? What have we received from Jesus that those without Him don't have?



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The transition from a life of futility to a life of following the Savior begins when we “throw off [our] sinful nature and [our] former way of life” (Ephesians 4:22). A more literal translation of “sinful nature” is “old man” or “old self.” To what was Paul referring? For help with the answer, consult your resources, and for an online resource, consult the entry “*old man*” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. What does it mean to “throw off” the old self?

What is the next step in [4:23](#)? And what did Paul mean by “renew”?

What is the final step in changing our wardrobe from old to new, according to [4:24](#)?



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I begin my day by realizing that the old self is corrupt and will never be less than corrupt. And it is deceitfully appealing. My day continues with frequent reminders that the new self is Christlike and wholly satisfying. This “renewed-in-the-spirit-of-your-mind” process needs to be done daily. The renewal of the mind is like clean, fresh water when we take a shower.
—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Transformed by Renewing the Mind

For Paul, the key to right living is renewing the mind. What did he teach about this daily practice in Romans 12:1–2? What other essential components of sanctification do you find in these verses?

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2)

What can we draw from Paul's words? Simply that God has designed a wonderful new wardrobe for every aspect of personhood. He wants to dress our new self with a heart that is soft and receptive; a mind that dwells on the words of Christ; a soul that is alive to the Spirit, not dead and excluded from God; and a lifestyle that is like Christ's, righteous and good.

What a wonderful hope there is! Instead of hardness and darkness and deadness and recklessness, there can be cleansing and holiness. And it starts at the cross.
—Chuck Swindoll



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Application: A Closing Focus

The source of all righteousness and goodness is in our heart. It is in the core of our being that our will and longings are formed, where we choose—by the power of the Holy Spirit—Christ as our Lord and seek after Him. When Christ is central in our choosing and our longing, He takes over our thoughts and desires. We can't wait to shed the old garments of sin and get dressed in our new clothes He gives us.

Close our study with a portion of a prayer known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” written circa AD 433. Make this prayer your application. Repeat it in the morning, reminding yourself to “put on your new nature” as you put on clean clothes for the day. Say it often throughout the week, along with memorized Scripture to renew your mind and put Christ at the center of who you are and all you do.

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.⁴*



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I come to the cross with my old garments and shed them before You. I claim Your forgiveness and cleansing regeneration. Thank You for the renewal You offer through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Clothe me in Christ and lead me in Your ways. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979), 107.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 153–54.
4. Attributed to St. Patrick, "St. Patrick's Breastplate," *Our Catholic Prayers*, www.ourcatholicprayers.com/st-patricks-breastplate.html.

