

*Ephesians 4:17* 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

*Eph 4:20* You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. <sup>21</sup> Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> 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; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. [Sermon Text]

## **IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE**

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who calls us to be new, dear friends,

Does anyone have a favorite pair of bedroom slippers, or a favorite shirt that is old and oh-so comfortable? It may be 20 years old, worn and ratty-looking, but it is familiar and just so comfortable that you love to wear it around the house. But your wife says to you, "It's time to get rid of that old thing. It looks terrible, and it is time to replace it." But you object. "No, I love that old shirt. I don't care if it is old and ratty looking. I just want to keep it." But your wife insists: "No, you should not be seen wearing that anymore."

That's kind of the idea that the Lord is communicating to us in this text from Ephesians. It's time to throw out the old and start wearing the new. It's time for a change."

## **IT'S TIME TO THROW OUT THE OLD**

Our text begins with a phrase that we don't often see in the New Testament. Paul writes: "*I tell you this, and **insist on it in the Lord.***" This means that the Lord is not just suggesting that we get rid of some old ratty things, the Lord is **INSISTING** on it.

Why "insist"? And what does this mean? If the Lord is insisting, and not just encouraging, then it must be something very important. This is critical to the Lord's purpose for our lives. This is essential if we are to be and do what God created us to be and do, and if we are to give Him glory and be His witnesses in the world. This is important to the Lord, and it is important in the Lord's church and mission.

In our text the apostle Paul describes just what that old, comfortable but ratty shirt is like. The phrases he uses to describe it make it clear that it is time to throw it out. When the Lord's apostle says, "*you must no longer live as the Gentiles do*" he is saying, "You must no longer live like unbelievers live."

And how do unbelievers live? Our text describes the way unbelievers **THINK** and the way unbelievers **BEHAVE**.

Unbelievers **THINK** differently than Christians do. Our text uses three phrases to describe their thinking. The first is "futility of thinking". Futility is like chasing something that you can never achieve. It's like when greyhound racing dogs chase that mechanical rabbit around the track. The faster they run, the faster the mechanical rabbit is moved. No matter how hard they try, they can't catch it. All their efforts are futile.

It's the same way without Christ. The unbeliever is chasing happiness and fulfillment. He is thinking that he will achieve it through money, success, recognition, possessions, or pleasure. But the goal seems to be moving all the time.

Solomon had all of the stuff that most people covet and spend their lives trying to achieve -- wealth, power, recognition, women, pleasure. Then he wrote: "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

Our text states the reason for this futility of 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.*" The main reason for the futility that the unbeliever feels is because they don't know Christ. They are in the dark about why they are here, what their purpose for living is, and how they are supposed to relate to God. They know that God is out there, and that He is concerned about how they live, but they don't know about His love and mercy, and they don't know what He has created them to do. They simply don't get it.

And the result of all this ignorance, futility, and lack of understanding, is what we typically call "hedonism." Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure, self-indulgence, pleasure-seeking, self-gratification.

The behavior of unbelievers is described in terms like, "lost all sensitivity," "indulge in every kind of impurity" and "continual lust for more." Unbelievers are not sensitive to the will of God and to what God declares to be right or wrong. They seek the gratification of their own sinful and often destructive urges, and only end up making things worse for themselves. It's like an addiction to sin. The more you do it, the more you want to keep doing it, and you can never live without it. And, like all addictions, sin destroys.

No wonder the apostle writes, "The Lord insists that you don't think and live like that." He loves us too much to let us waste our lives in pleasure-seeking and destructive living. He wants us to have something better. He says that it is time for a change.

### **IT'S TIME TO WEAR THE NEW**

One of the things about that old, ratty unbelieving lifestyle, is that it can become comfortable to us. It's like that old shirt that is torn and threadbare, but we get used to it, and it can even be hard to let it go. I know a grandpa whose kids gave him a beautiful new 42" flat-screen TV for Christmas one year. On Christmas Day grandpa told them to just set it up on top of the old small tube TV, promising that he would eventually find a better place for the new one. But when they came back to visit again on his birthday about five months later, they discovered that grandpa was still using his old TV instead of the new one. When they asked him why, he just shrugged and said, "I'm just used to the old one, that's all."

We can get used to the old unbeliever's lifestyle also. It's like that old ratty-looking shirt that we don't want to let go. But God urges us to trash that old way, and put on the new life that He has purchased for us. He says, "*put on the new self, created to be like God.*"

God has created something new and better for us. It begins with a new attitude. "*Be made new in the attitude of your minds,*" he says. The old attitude was, "I'm the most important. It's all about me, my wants, my desires, my pleasure, my self-gratification. The NEW attitude is: "It's all about my Lord. It is about what He wants, what He needs done, what will best serve His interests." The new attitude is: "My Lord comes first in every part of my life."

This new attitude comes from "*knowing Christ*" and being "*taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*" Now, instead of being ignorant of God's great love and mercy upon me, I have been taught the truth about God and His great sacrifice.

Sometimes you don't appreciate something until you understand what it costs. When I was little, I never appreciated fresh peas and beans and how good a fresh ear of corn or tomato tasted. Those things were just set in front of me, and I ate them and never thought about their value.

But when I was older and had my own garden, and I tilled the soil, raked it smooth, bought the seeds, planted them carefully, weeded and staked and watered and cared for the garden, and then finally picked the ripe fruit, I had a greater appreciation for fresh vegetables, because I knew what it took to grow them.

That's how it is for us now. Now that we know a little more of what it cost our Lord to take away our sin and purchase eternal life for us, and now that we know a little better what Jesus did on that cross so that we might one day be in heaven, and now that we know the truth about the price that was paid to purchase eternal life for us, we appreciate a little better our Lord and the new life that He offers and gives us through the cross.

And so, our new attitude is, "I want to be and do all that God created me to be and do." But the problem is that we still have that old unbeliever inside of us. Paul writes, "*put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.*" We still have that "old self" inside of us, that unconverted part of us that still needs to be told, "It's time to change."

When we plant a garden, we clear the area, dig up the sod, till the soil, smooth it out, and plant our seeds. There is not a weed in sight. But it doesn't take long for the weeds to come back. And even if we pull them out regularly, they still keep re-appearing. They are stubborn and persistent, and we need to bend over and weed constantly, or they will eventually take over the entire garden.

Our lives are like that. Christ plows our hearts with His law and plants the Gospel in the soil of our lives. But the weeds keep coming back. They just keep coming up. They seem to just be in the soil and pop up overnight. They need to be weeded out over and over again. So put off the old self, which is "*corrupted by its deceitful desires.*" When a computer file is corrupt, it is no good any more. Deceitful desires are desires that promises something good and satisfying, but then break that promise; they deceive, they lie to us like premarital sex; drugs, alcohol, eating or drinking too much; rebelling against authority. So why follow those desires. It's time for a change.

So the Lord's apostle says, "*Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*" When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His own image. He wanted them to be like Him in some way. Not that they would be like God in *appearance*, because God does not have a body like we do. But that they would be like God in character. As God is holy and righteous, He wanted human beings, the crown of His creation, to be holy and righteous.

When I was little, I wanted to be like Ernie Banks, shortstop for the Chicago Cubs, my hero. I wanted to hold a baseball bat the way he did, and swing like he did. I pounded my baseball glove the way I had seen him do, and I wore my hat the way he did.

That's how we Christians feel about living lives. Not that we all want to be like Ernie Banks, but that we all want to be like Jesus. We want to be compassionate and forgiving like He was. We want to be devoted to doing the Lord's will like He was. We want to pray like He prayed. We want to carry our cross like He did. We want to suffer and sacrifice for the sake of others, like He did.

That's the "new self" that God has created in us. You see, God is not only interested in saving our souls for going to heaven. But He is also dedicated to changing our lives until we become more and more like Jesus.

So it is time for a change. It is time to throw away that comfortable, but ratty old life of confusion and self-gratification, and put on the new clothes that were purchased for us by the blood of Christ. So let's go through the closet of our lives, and out with the old, and in with the new. Amen.