

A New Set of Clothes (Ephesians 4:17-5:4)

I want us to go back in time, to a time when the make-up of the church was changing. In the early church, in the Acts of the Apostles we know that the majority of the converts were Jews. There were non-Jews, Gentiles who had entered the church, but the greater number was Jews. So what?

Well for the Jews, they would already have a belief in God. They would already know some of the Old Testament. This is why it is wrong thinking to say that the Apostle Paul, the writer of this letter to the church of God at Ephesus, in his Damascus Road experience was converted from nothing to full knowledge. This type of thinking leads to people expecting that when they become a Christian, then the Holy Spirit implants in them all that they need to know and I have know people who have said that they do not need to read the Bible because they have been baptised in the Spirit. We need the Spirit, we need to be baptised, to be filled with the Spirit, but this does not mean that we do not need to read the Bible and grow from it.

So the Jews began a long way down the track, but as the nature of the people coming to know Jesus as friend, Lord and Saviour began to change, then the knowledge based and even the worldview of the new Christians was so different from that of Christianity. So they began Catechism classes.

For some eighteen months new Christians were not allowed to go a full church service. They were allowed in for the sermon, but were not allowed to be there for the worship or communion. In addition to attending the sermon, they were expected daily, before going to work, to go to Catechism classes, or it can be called a new Christians' course where they learned about Jesus and the Bible, but also it was their worldview that had to change from a Graeco-Roman worldview where there were many gods with the Emperor being a god as well, to the God of the Bible, the God that they had come to know. Also their attitudes and values had to be changed as well.

After they had gone through the classes they were then allowed to attend a whole church service, when their worldview had been changed to a Christian worldview.

This is then what Paul is talking about in the verses that we have read this evening. We need a New Set of Clothes, we need as Christians to have a completely new way of thinking, a new worldview. This is why in these verses we read such a lot about thinking, about the mind. Paul talks about the

- Futility of thinking :17
- Being darkened in their understanding :18
- Because of ignorance :18

And then he says

- Heard of him :21 carrying the thought of understanding
- Taught in him :22
- Made new in the attitudes of your minds :23

The mind, the understanding, the thinking all have to be changed. The worldview must be different in the Christian than in a non-Christian or else how can being a Christian be of any value. Without the change in worldview, without the change of thinking, then there will not be a change in values which will then lead to a change in behaviour, the bit that people see.

But it all begins with the relationship. Verse 20

“You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.” (Ephesians 4:20 NIV)

...come to know Christ. This is more than knowledge, it is a relationship. We need to begin with the relationship with Jesus before we can begin to change the worldview – that is the key, that is the base from which we work – that is the person who supply the New Set Of Clothes.

So why do we need a New Set Of Clothes? Paul gives several reasons.

Be One With God – firstly we are told in verse 24 that we are

“...created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:24 NIV)

If God is true righteousness and true holiness, then we are to be as well – we are to be One With God. But without God we cannot be one with him because we have all sinned because we are human, full stop. This sin cuts us off from God – only God in Jesus, God the Son, could bring us back to be one with him. So with the Holy Spirit within and by allowing our mindset, our worldview to be changed we can become more and more righteous, more and more holy, more and more at one with God – this is the process known as sanctification. This comes from being in relationship with Jesus and by increasing our knowledge of how to be holy by reading the Bible with open hearts and minds which are guided by the Holy Spirit.

So once where our mindset, our worldview was to be against God – that is our natural coming out, we are to have a worldview of allowing God to guide us, to us allowing God to take over and teach us his way and forgo my way. The Frank Sinatra song may say

I did it my way

But our song should be

We did it God’s way

Be One With Each Other – and then in verse 25, Paul says

“...we are all members of one body.” (Ephesians 4:25 NIV)

We have to be one with each other. We are all Christians together and this is why we should be saying

We did it God’s way

We are together as one body of God’s people and so at times I have to suppress my preference for the purposes of God. I may like things to be done this way, but if others are being blessed, if others are growing, if others are becoming Christians, then I have to suppress my preferences.

I can remember when Sue and I began in ministry that during mid week there was the midweek meeting called the Bible Study and Prayer Meeting. In most churches it was just like a Sunday service. As an innovation a time of open prayer was introduced for the last part of the meeting so that the minister did not do the round the world prayer.

The church we were in had this and it was not well attended and changes to the format of the meeting were resisted because it did not fit in with some people’s preferences but there was a sizeable group of people who needed to grow, but did not come to the midweek Bible Study and Prayer Meeting because they could not understand the Bible Study and to them it was boring.

So Sue and I began a spirituality course, in a home, midweek, which soon attracted more people than the Bible Study and Prayer Meeting which I was also taking. About a year after this the church changed over to housegroups where far more people were meeting for Bibles Study, for Prayer and for fellowship – even many of those whose preference was to meet at church.

Also Being One With Each Other means that we build each other up. Verse 29

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only *what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*” (Ephesians 4:29 NIV)

To often in this society we are ready to pull down – to find the feet of clay. If a person is doing well we revel in the dirt being dished. However as Christians together we should be those, Being One With Each Other should mean that we see the potential in others and build them up, encouraging people to fulfil their potential, their God-given potential.

Be Against Satan – So we need to have a change in worldview to be One With God, to Be One With Each Other by suppressing my preferences with building up others, and we also need to Be Against Satan. We are told in verse 27

“... not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4:27 NIV)

We are the people of God, the new set of clothes, the change in worldview is so that the devil does not get a foothold, not a thin edge of the wedge in our lives, in our church.

And what I like about Paul, he is always very practical and tells us how we are to live. He gives examples. It is no good our mind being full of theology if there are no practicalities. Our beliefs, our values must come out in practical down to earth things. So he gives several examples in a way like the real game of snakes and ladders. The squares of virtue on the original game are Faith (12), Reliability (51), Generosity (57), Knowledge (76), Asceticism (78) and the squares of evil are Disobedience (41), Vanity (44), Vulgarly (49), Theft (52), Lying (58), Drunkenness (62), Debt (69), Rage (84), Greed (92), Pride (95), Murder (73) and Lust (99). However you may have played it with Penitence, Thrift and Industry elevating a player up a ladder to squares labelled Grace, Fulfilment and Success while Indolence, Indulgence and Disobedience slid a player down to Poverty, Illness and Disgrace.

Here Paul, slightly differently tells us a vice and then tells us the virtue that it should be.

Lies to Truth – the first is lies to truth. Verse 25

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body.” (Ephesians 4:25 NIV)

Telling lies, speaking falsehood is wrong and of the devil for Jesus said

“...The devil was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44 NIV)

Lies lead to distrust, even the ones that we tell so as not to hurt someone. How many wives have said to their husbands, “How do I look in this?” And how many husbands have said, “Fine, great” just to get out of the shop quickly and also not to hurt the wife. Lies are wrong, but Paul has already reminded the Ephesians in verse 15

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15 NIV)

We are not to lie, but we are to speak the truth in love, because we are members of one body so that we can all grow to be more like Jesus.

Temper to Settlement – Then Paul mentions anger or temper. Now it is not wrong to be angry, because God is said to be angry and this is righteous anger. But we are fallible human beings and we must beware unless our anger turns into malice which is long term anger and so leads to thoughts of revenge. This is why in verse 26 he says

“‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,”
(Ephesians 4:26 NIV)

The Message puts it this way

Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry--but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. (Ephesians 4:26 MSG)

Don't go to bed angry. I have known couple stay up half the night sorting something out because they have not wanted to go to bed angry!

We must try even when angry to speak the soft word for as Proverbs 15 says

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
(Proverbs 15:1 NIV)

We cannot be one of those people that blow up and then say, “Well at least it is out in the open” because it is the damage that is done when the outburst happens. By all means let us be angry, we should be angry about sin, about injustice, about abuse, about lots of things, but let us not sin, but causing damage to others in our anger.

Stealing to Work – then we have stealing to work. Stealing again undermines our society and can have strange spin-offs. Because we live in a society where stealing occurs we have to have locks and some people are even now making their homes a fortress with high walls and gates that need an intercom to get in. Maybe one day we will all be like that – that is how some film projected into the future show our society. But this then leads to loneliness, to people being unapproachable, people going from home behind locked gates, into cars that are locked, to places of work, again behind locked doors ordering our goods on the internet which are then delivered.

Stealing undermines trust again and we must fight against it and be honest and not steal, be those who work hard and note verse 28

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have *something to share with those in need.*”
(Ephesians 4:28 NIV)

The reason is so we have something to share with others, not to get on in this life. Again it is to be One With God and One With Each Other.

Unwholesome Talk to Encouragement – And finally because time is getting on. It is in the area of the tongue. We are not to run others down, speak unwholesome talk does not necessarily mean bad or foul language, but talk that is not helpful. We are to be those who build each other up, who are encouraging one another and so help one another.

This is our Set of New Clothes and we haven't really gone into bitterness and rage and malice and anger and cutting words and slander being changed into kindness and compassion and forgiveness and self-sacrifice. In our change in worldview where we are At One With God, imitators of God, and At One With Each Other and if that isn't happening, then maybe it is our worldview that needs to change. But before we can change our worldview we need to have that relationship with Jesus, to know Jesus and be prepared to learn under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by reading his Word, the Bible.