

## "What Will You Choose Today?"

*Ephesians 4:25-32*

Every day we make this choice: what will I wear today? We here in North America have a lot to choose from when it comes to what we'll put on today while many people in the world have very little choice. Even in the 1<sup>st</sup> century there wasn't a whole lot of choice for most people. But the basic choice was we change what we wear from nighttime to daytime.

Paul uses this everyday analogy to make a bigger point: do we choose each morning (like we change our clothes each morning) what attitude we'll wear? As a follower of Jesus will we put on a proactive, I'm in Christ, loving demeanour or a worldly, reactionary my-day-better-go-my-way or I'm really going to be ticked off demeanour? Which of those people would you prefer to be around? If you'd rather be around the proactive, in-Christ, loving person then let's choose to live like who we are called to be. But to do that we need to choose what we'll put off and put on. Paul puts it this way in Eph. 4:17

*<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

Paul spent Ch.'s 1-3 teaching what's new now that we are in Christ. Paul used that phrase to speak of our security in Christ. Sealed by the Spirit, predestined to be conformed to Christ, blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, received forgiveness, redeemed by the blood of Jesus all by God's pleasure and for His glory. Paul uses all this as our motive to live the new life now even though we're not sinless yet nor are we in heaven yet. If we know we'll be perfectly complete and sinless in Christ we should be reflecting this new life as obvious as the clothes we wear.

Here in Ch. 4 Paul reminds us Jesus has given us gifts of grace to help the whole body grow together in Christ (vv.1-16). People who before didn't get along (Jew and Gentile) are now united and equal in Christ. Paul now calls us to put off the before-we-were-saved old life and put on the new-now that-we're-saved life. He uses the strongest language he can think of here in v.17. . .

*<sup>17</sup> 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.*

And similarly in v.23,

*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.*

Paul uses the 'change your clothes' image as a word picture for changing the way we think. The old self followed the old way of thinking, following deceitful desires. Our new self is made new in

the attitude of our minds. 2 Cor. 5:17 says we are new creations, created to be like Christ in true righteousness and holiness. This is how God is slowly conforming us to the image of Jesus.

We must think new if we want to stop living the old unloving way. Remove the old ways of thinking and put on the new way of thinking - love. Vv. 17-24 is the general principle, now in vv.25-32 he gives specific examples. You can't just say 'I'm going to stop living like I used to before I was saved, you have to replace it with a new way of living. While this applies to loving the unsaved for sure, that's not Paul's focus, is it?

*<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Notice how Paul uses Jesus' 'love your neighbour' language but he's applying it specifically to the body of Christ. The more we apply God's truth to our lives the closer we will get to accomplishing the goal God has for us, which Paul stated in vv.15-16.

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

And the work Paul wants to do is phrased in putting off the old Satanic hurting habits and replacing them with Christlike loving habits. And he gives five ways we need to do that which will bring us closer together.

*<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

## **Put off dishonest speech and Put on honest speech** **Because we're God's family (v.25)**

Falsehood can mean lies or any type of deception in our speech. Sometimes we outright lie when we give dishonest answers about not wanting to do something or go somewhere because we selfishly don't want to. So we tell little lies like, 'Sorry, it doesn't work for me.' 'I feel like I might be coming down with something' or 'I'm expecting family to show up'. And we convince ourselves that we didn't lie and yet falsehood means deceive. It's clearly the opposite of truth.

Another way we speak dishonestly is when we're trying to impress someone and we exaggerate something about us. Paul tells us in Rom. 12:3

*'Do not think of yourself more higher than you ought but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you'.*

What does he mean by "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."? I think he explains it in the next two verses:

*<sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

We don't have to try to impress anyone ever again if we have a healthy understanding of who we are in Christ. God has given us the measure of faith we need to know Him and the spiritual gifts to serve Him in the roles He gives us. While we all need to grow in our faith, the truth is the more I know who I am in Christ the surer I am and less concerned about what others think. We need to be content with who God has made us to be. He accepts us since He made us. His approval is really all that matters.

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The next put off/put on pair is v.26.

<sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.

People hurt us unfairly at times and the old sin nature gets annoyed. Paul knows we often initially get angry but he's saying we need to refrain from acting on that anger.

### **Put off remembering hurts, put on forgiving the hurter. Because Satan loves discord (v.26)**

By the end of the day (if not sooner) don't hold on to anger when someone has hurt you unfairly. We can hang on to hurts for days, weeks, months and years. Paul says to forgive him in hours and minutes! We must forgive what people do to us because Jesus commands us to. Peter approached Jesus and thought he was magnanimous when he said 'How often should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to 7 times? (Matt. 18:21). Jesus said '70 x 7' or in other words, stop counting and start forgiving. Many people don't realize that Jesus referred to Gen. 4:23, regarding a man named Lamech. Earlier when God confronted Cain for murdering Abel he was worried that someone might come and kill him now. But God put a mark on him as a promise that He would avenge 7 times anyone who killed Cain. Later in the chapter, we read of an evil man named Lamech who says in v.23,

*I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. <sup>24</sup>If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."*

In other words, 'I will always pay more evil for any evil done to me'. Anyone who hurts me I'll hurt back even worse. But Jesus' way was the opposite. Forgive anyone who hurts you otherwise, you'll be like the Lamechs in the world; vengeful, and angry.

Paul is quoting Ps. 4:4 here which says,

<sup>4</sup> *In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah*  
<sup>5</sup> *Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord.*  
<sup>7</sup> *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.*  
<sup>8</sup> *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

See what Paul was saying? Let it go quickly or it will consume your thoughts day and night. You won't be content until you do. Who among us hasn't lost sleep because we've stewed about a hurt done to us? The imperatives 'do not sin', 'don't let the sun go down' and 'do not give the devil an opportunity' are called 'prohibitive imperatives which means 'stop doing this now'. The only way it will stop is by forgiving again and again and again – like Jesus.

Forgive that hurt you've been holding on to because if you don't all you're doing is pleasing Satan and grieving the Holy Spirit. He loves discord in the body of Christ. How can we grow to be like Christ if we refuse to act like Christ?

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The next put off/put on example is in v.28,

*<sup>28</sup>Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

### **Put off our 'taking' attitude and put on a giving attitude. To meet people's needs (v.28)**

Paul commanded some of these believers to stop stealing and get a job. Perhaps this was how some used to live and were still doing it. They needed food but stealing wasn't the way. Find work, meet your needs, and meet the needs of others so no one else steals.

We may not be guilty of theft but we may be guilty of a take mentality. We want people to serve us. We want things to be done our way; at home, at work, at church. 'I want' language is a take mentality. Jesus came to serve not to be served and gave His life as a ransom for many. Instead of focusing on our preferences, be like Jesus and focus on what others need. When we serve others we'll discover we'll be less concerned about having things done our way.

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The next put off, put on pairing comes in v.29 and Paul talks about the way we use our words:

*<sup>29</sup>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.*

The take/serve couplet had to do with meeting people's physical needs. Here Paul deals with our emotional needs;

### **Put off damaging words and Put on encouraging words So people are built up (vv.29-30)**

The word "unwholesome" means rancid, rotting, useless words. The same word is used in Matt. 13:48

*<sup>47</sup>"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.*

*<sup>48</sup>When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets but threw the bad away.*

How do you know fish is bad? It stinks. Ever found a rotten potato in a bag of potatoes? Not nice is it? Paul compares our negative, criticizing words to rotting food. Since this is God's Word, God thinks the same. Our cutting, critical words grieve the Holy Spirit – who lives inside each of us. Again it's a prohibitive imperative meaning; stop doing this.

How? When tempted to say critical things that tear down, don't let it come out. Think of better words. Words that strengthen and build up. Isn't this what you want to hear from others? Last week we read,

*Matt. 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Speak words that are suitable for the occasion. Speak encouraging words of thanks after someone has served you or the church family. Think ahead about people's needs so that you can think ahead of what to say to them. The drive-through mentality sometimes happens in church. You come only thinking about what you want to get and then you leave forgetting to thank the people who gave it to you.

*Heb. 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

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The fifth put off/put on couplet is found in vv.31-32 and there's some overlap here

*<sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

***Put off a bitter spirit and put on a Christlike gracious spirit because God's grace is poured out on us (vv.31-32)***

The word for 'get rid of' can mean kill or destroy. Paul's saying take drastic measures so you don't become bitter. This is what happens when we let sin take hold of us. If we struggle with bitterness, rage, brawling, or slander we've got some serious sins we need to remove. We need to let God make us more like Jesus. We must treat people the exact opposite of what our sinful nature wants to do. When tempted to be angry and bitter we should show compassion and kindness. Notice he commands us to act kindly not just have good intentions about being kind. And this imperative means make a conscious decision today to choose to live like this.

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So Paul gives 5 sinful habits we need to put off [like yesterday's clothes] and put on the new spiritual habits of today. Clothes are a good illustration because it's what people see when they look at us. If we're in Christ we need to stop living like we used to before Christ and keep living more and more each day of our new life. None of the sins mentioned has any power over us. If we're bitter over a hurt, we choose to be bitter. If we're sarcastic and critical we choose to be that way. But when we choose to obey God's Word the Spirit enables us to obey God's word.

Our February memory verse will help us apply Eph. 4. Paul said to put off the old clothes of the sinful nature and put on the clothes of the new nature. Love others like Christ. Let's work on memorizing Rom. 13:14.

*<sup>14</sup>Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Rom. 13:14)*

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