



# The Old and New Self

## Kicking It Off

When you were growing up, was there a setting or occasion that called for your "best behavior," and how did you act differently when you were there?

## Read

Ephesians 4:17-32

## Summary

Think about how differently you act when you know the occasion matters. You sit up a little straighter, you pay attention to the person across the table, you do the small things that say "this matters to me." That posture is not natural, it takes some effort, but it fits the moment. Now think about your life with God the same way. A lot of us spend our energy chasing comfort and never stop to ask what the right posture before the Lord even looks like. Paul gets at this in Ephesians 4 with a picture that is hard to forget. The world, cut off from God, lives like an animal with its face in the bowl, grabbing what it can the fastest way it can, because that is the only way it knows. That is not really an insult. If you had no Master and no provision, you would fend for yourself too.

The turn comes when Christ enters the picture. He does not just hand us a better rulebook. He invites us into His house, where He is in charge and He takes care of everything we need. So the new life is not about memorizing a code of conduct. It is about learning a Person. We put off the old self, the one our own desires keep lying to, and we put on a new self that God actually created in us. The thing to hold onto is that none of this earns your place at the table. You are already loved, already forgiven, already saved. Your posture does not decide that. But your posture does reveal what your heart feels toward Jesus. The question is never "do I have to do these things." The question is "do I love Him enough to want to honor Him," and then to let that show up in how you talk, how you work, how you handle anger, and how quickly you forgive.

## Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul says the old way of life is a settled habit of mind, not just a single bad choice. Where in your own life have you noticed an old pattern of thinking that quietly shapes how you act?
3. The sermon described wanting Christ as Master while still living wild and independent. In what area are you most tempted to call Jesus Lord but keep running your own life?
4. Verse 24 says the new self is something God created, not something we manufacture. How does it change your effort to know the new self is a gift you put on rather than a self you build from scratch?
5. Paul grounds the command to forgive in the forgiveness we already received in Christ. Is there someone you are finding hard to forgive, and how does remembering your own forgiveness reframe that?
6. The sermon said we are filled on Sunday so that we can serve during the week. What is one concrete way you could turn what you have received into service for someone this week?

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

"The world wants you to have an animalistic, naturalistic posture, whereas God is calling you to a better posture, one that you were made for."

"Your posture does not dictate your salvation. Your posture is dictating the state of your heart."

"My faith is not a set of rules. My faith is a faith in a Person, and relationships are dynamic. They are alive and living."

"You have not been served so you can go home and keep it to yourself. You have been served so that you can serve, because that is what Jesus wants you to do."

## Sermon Notes

**Ephesians 4:17-32**

*17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

## Outline

1. The walk you left behind (vv. 17-19).
  - a. Before Christ the mind runs in a closed circuit of futility.
  - b. The Gentiles are not acting in defiance; they live the only way they know, like a wild animal that has no master and so must fend for itself.
  - c. Darkened understanding hardens into a settled callousness (v. 18), and the end of that road is sensuality and greed.
  - d. The problem is not weak willpower. It is a heart cut off from the life of God.
2. The Christ you learned (vv. 20-24).
  - a. The break with the old life is a Person, not a program. We did not learn a technique, we learned Him.
  - b. Learning Him means putting off the old self, being renewed in the mind, and putting on a new self that God created in true righteousness and holiness.
  - c. The desires of the old self lie to us.
  - d. The new self is something God made, not a better version we assemble.
3. The life that follows (vv. 25-32).
  - a. Each command pairs a putting off with a putting on.
  - b. Stop lying and speak truth, stop stealing and work so you can give, put away corrupting talk and build others up.
  - c. The reasons are relational, not a ledger.
  - d. We speak truth because we are members of one another, and we guard our words so we do not grieve the Holy Spirit who sealed us.
  - e. The list lands on forgiveness, grounded in the forgiveness we received in Christ.

## Notes

Today is my twelfth wedding anniversary, and I keep coming back to how my marriage actually started. Grace and I were friends for years before we ever dated. When we finally did, I wanted to treat her well, so I paid attention to the small things, opening the car door, pulling out her chair, always paying for the meal. None of that was because a rulebook required it. It was because the occasion mattered to me, and she mattered to me. I think that is the right doorway into Ephesians 4, because Paul is not handing the church a code of manners. He is describing what happens to people who have come to love someone.

When we lived in Texas I heard about cotillion, where children learn which fork to use and how to carry themselves at the table. I never went through it, but I picked up the idea behind it. Good posture is not naturally comfortable. Slouching is comfortable. Sitting up straight takes muscle you have to build. The point of learning to carry yourself well is that the occasion calls for it, and a certain posture honors the occasion. We talk about physical posture and social posture all the time, but we rarely talk about our spiritual posture. We are so concerned with being comfortable that we never ask what the right posture before the Lord even looks like.

Here is the picture I want you to hold. Imagine someone eating out of a bowl on their hands and knees, face down in the food, no hands, no fork, getting up with the meal all over their face. It should turn your stomach. That is the image Paul gives us of the old way. The Gentiles eat like that not because they are wicked at the core but because it is the only way they know. They are darkened in their minds. The logic of the old self is simple. I am hungry, so I will get my food the fastest way possible. Why use a fork when my face works. And the world runs on that logic. People grab and protect and make sure they have enough for themselves and theirs, and they do it the way an animal gathers resources. That is not a slur against them. If you were a wild animal in the mountains, what else would you do. You eat when there is food because you have no storehouse, you seek comfort when comfort is available, because there is no master and no provision and no other way to live.

I want to be careful here, because I am not preaching at the pagans. What good is it to lecture someone on table manners when they do not even know they are at a table with someone who loves them. Paul is not writing to outsiders. He is writing to the church, to people who profess Jesus. So I have to turn the critique inward. The hard word is not "look how the world eats." The hard word is how often the church eats the same way. We act like the old self, no propriety in worship, no sense that anything special is happening, and then we look down on the world for being barbaric. Paul's concern is not the people who have never heard. His concern is us. And the word is not "you are

rejected." The word is "wake up. Sit up straight. Put the napkin on your lap. Wait for the others to be served before you dig in."

This is where the relationship changes everything. The reason we no longer eat like the Gentiles is that this is a special occasion. The life we now live, we live with Christ. Live as though Jesus is present, because by the Spirit He is. People who do not know Him cannot see why any of it matters, and that is exactly the point. Their ignorance is not only that they never heard. Paul says it grows out of hardness of heart. That actually takes pressure off you and me. Our job is to tell the truth and show them the light. Whether the heart softens is the Lord's work, not ours.

So Paul names the old walk plainly. The mind runs in a closed loop of futility, and that darkened thinking is not one bad choice but a settled way of life that hardens over time. I keep coming back to the wild animal, because the world romanticizes it. Be free, be wild, be who you really are, do not let rules constrain you. It even gets dressed up in Christian language, "be the person God made you to be, do not worry about all the regulations." It sounds wonderful. But a wild horse has to find its own food and its own shelter and fend off its own predators, and when it cannot, it dies. That is not freedom. That is being on your own. Then the Master enters the equation. Christ comes while we are still sinners and says, do you want to come home, do you want to live in My house where I am in charge and I take care of everything you need. The church is the people who say yes, I no longer want to fend for myself, I want to trust my Master.

The tension is that we want it both ways. Lord, be my Master, but let me stay wild. We grew up with an outdoor cat named Twinkle. Independent, got her own dinner, did not need us. And one day she simply did not come back, and we never knew what happened to her, because she was a free creature on her own. I think the world wants Christians exactly there, the alley cat who calls Jesus Lord but never acts like it, in the family but living outdoors, claiming the name and keeping the old life. Stop living in the middle. You are welcome in the house of God. The Master has prepared a room for you. The only question is whether He is really your Master or you are still trying to survive on your own.

Then comes a word I do not want anyone to misread. Put off the old self, be renewed in the mind, put on the new. The job of salvation is finished. Jesus was victorious on the cross, and your posture does not earn or threaten your salvation. But your posture reveals the state of your heart. People resist hearing that they need to fix their posture because they think a critique disqualifies them from the date. It does not. If you show up to dinner slouching, untucked, hair a mess, you are still on the date. Christ still loves you. He does not care about expensive clothes or hours on your hair. He cares about you. A good relationship is not built on looking perfect. It is built on being intentional, on caring

about the day. So the question is not whether the rules condemn you. There is no legalism here. The question is what your heart reflects about your love for Jesus. Are you looking for the bare minimum, or do you want to honor Him.

This is why I say our faith is not a set of rules but a Person. Rules are tied to situations, and I am not good enough to know the right rule for every circumstance. But a relationship is alive and dynamic. So instead of "I have to wear this, I have to do that," there is the joy of asking each morning, Lord, what would honor You most today. Sit up straight spiritually, shoulders back, with confidence rather than neurotic worry about which fork is next. And remember that Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and He sets the pattern for us. When you are filled here on a Sunday, you are not filled so you can go home and keep it. You are served so that you can serve. That is the whole plan for your life, to love God and love others. Everything else is detail.

That is how the commands in verses 25 to 32 work. Each one takes off something old and puts on something new. Put away lying and speak the truth, because we are members of one another. Be angry without sin, and do not let it fester into a foothold for the devil. Stop stealing and work, so you have something to share. Take off corrupting talk and replace it, not with silence, but with words that build people up. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit. This is not the unforgivable sin. It is closer to hurting the feelings of someone who loves you. I hurt my wife's feelings more than I want to admit, out of bitterness or resentment I let grow, and she would tell you it stings. The Spirit can be grieved by our bitterness and wrath and malice, and the sensitivity of that relationship is a beautiful thing, not a burden. So how do you not grieve Him. Be kind. Be tenderhearted. Forgive one another, because you have been forgiven much, and the measure of your forgiving is the forgiveness you received in Christ.

None of this is a checklist, and I refuse to turn it into one. Everyone in the room is wrestling with the old self, so we can put down the pitchforks and stop pretending otherwise. The forces pulling us toward the dog bowl, the feeds telling us our joy is one more purchase or one more trip away, are not going away. But take a breath. Through the cross, Jesus wants to clothe you in a new self. Even an ordinary Monday becomes a special occasion when you remember you get to have breakfast with your Savior. The world says all joy is temporary, and on its own terms it is right. We know something better. There is a joy that is eternal, and it comes from the Lord. So put off the old self, put on the new, and follow Him with everything, because the joy He gives cannot be stripped away.

## Blog

There is a version of the Christian life that I can run on autopilot, and I know it because I have done it. I'm pretty good at following routines. I show up, I serve, I pray before meals, I know the answers when the questions come. From the outside everything looks like following Jesus. But following implies movement, and if I am honest, there have been long stretches where nothing in me was actually moving. I had learned Christ once, years ago, and somewhere along the way that past tense quietly became the whole story. I was a follower of Christ who was not, in any active sense, following.

Ephesians 4:17-32 will not leave that arrangement alone. Paul opens with unusual weight: "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds" (4:17). He is not offering a suggestion for spiritual enrichment. He testifies, the way a witness testifies under oath, that the people who belong to Christ cannot keep walking the way they used to walk. And the first thing he names about the old walk is not behavior. It is thinking. The Gentile world, he says, runs on a mind that goes nowhere, a reasoning process that loops and loops and never arrives at the life of God.

Then he traces how a mind gets that way, and the sequence should unsettle us. They are "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (4:18). Each stage feeds the next. The understanding darkens, the darkness cuts a person off from God's life, the separation breeds ignorance, and underneath it all sits a hardened heart. The Greek word for that hardness, *porosis*, was a medical term for the callus that forms over a broken bone. A callus is not dramatic. It builds slowly, layer by layer, precisely where there has been repeated pressure, and its whole function is to stop you from feeling. That is how a heart hardens. Not in one catastrophic decision, but in a thousand small moments of pressing the same spot until the nerve goes quiet. The end of that road, Paul says, is a life "given up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" (4:19), desire with the brakes cut, an appetite that consumes more and feels less.

Here is what catches me when I sit with those verses. Paul is describing pagans, people who never knew God. But the mechanism he describes, the slow callusing of a heart under repeated pressure, does not check for a membership card. A believer who has settled in, who has stopped moving, who has learned to press the same spot of complacency week after week, is building callus too. Comfort can do to a Christian heart what rebellion does to a pagan one, just more politely. The futile mind does not always look like open godlessness. Sometimes it looks like a faith that has gone numb in the pews.

Against all of that, Paul sets one sentence, and it is the hinge of the whole passage: "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" (4:20). The phrase is strange on purpose. You can learn facts, learn skills, learn doctrine, but Paul says we learned a Person. Not about Him. Him. The Christian life began not when we mastered a body of content but when we were apprenticed to Jesus Himself, "as the truth is in Jesus" (4:21). And that one phrase quietly answers the question of what this passage is for. If what we learned was a Person, then the Christian life is following that Person, and following is something you do in the present tense. You cannot apprentice yourself to Jesus in the past tense any more than you can take a walk in the past tense. The simple logic of discipleship is that a follower of Christ actually follows Christ. The logic is easy. The practice is where we falter.

What does the following look like? Paul reaches for the most ordinary image he can find: getting dressed. We were taught "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:22-24). Two garments. The old self is the person we were in Adam, and Paul's diagnosis of it is precise: it is corrupted "through deceitful desires." The desires lie. They promise life and deliver the futility of verse 17. Every time I reach back for the old self, I am believing a sales pitch that has never once delivered. Putting it off means calling the lie a lie.

But notice carefully what Paul says about the new self, because this is where the whole passage either becomes good news or collapses into a burden. The new self is "created after the likeness of God." Created. That is God's verb, the same word Genesis uses for what only He can do. I do not manufacture the new self through effort, willpower, or accumulated religious performance. God has already made it, fashioned after His own likeness, and handed it to me in Christ. My part is not construction. My part is getting dressed. And between the putting off and the putting on, Paul places the engine of the whole thing: "be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (4:23). The verb is ongoing, continual, present tense. The renewal happens exactly where the old life went wrong, in the mind. The futile mind gets renewed, day by day, and the renewed mind reaches for the new clothes.

Then come the commands, and I want to be direct about how not to read them, because verses 25 through 32 are where religiosity loves to set up shop. Speak truth. Deal with anger before sundown. Stop stealing and work so you can give. No corrupting talk, only words that build. Put away bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander. Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving. Read wrongly, that list becomes a checklist, a scorecard, a way of measuring whether we have done enough to be acceptable. And Paul has already ruled that reading out. Not one of these commands comes with the reason "so that God will accept you."

Look at the reasons he actually gives. Speak truth "for we are members one of another" (4:25). Guard your mouth so that you "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30). Forgive "as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32). Every motive is relational. We tell the truth because we belong to each other. We watch our words because a Person lives in us who can be grieved. We forgive because we have been forgiven, and the forgiveness we received sets the standard for the forgiveness we extend. Grace comes first in every single verse. The commands are not the price of the new self. They are its wardrobe, the shape the new creation takes on a Tuesday, at a dinner table, in a tense conversation, in the moment someone wrongs you and you decide what to do with it.

This is the difference between religiosity and discipleship, and the difference is everything. Religiosity reads Ephesians 4 and hears a list of requirements to satisfy. Discipleship reads Ephesians 4 and hears a description of where following Jesus actually leads. The healthy body does not breathe to earn its life; it breathes because it is alive. The new self speaks truth and forgives and builds others up because that is what the new self is, and wearing it is how we follow the Christ we learned.

So the question this passage puts to me is not whether I have checked the boxes. The question is where I have settled. Where has the callus formed? For some of us it is our speech, the corrosive sarcasm we have decided is just our personality. For some it is anger we have let see a hundred sundowns. For some it is simply the numbness, the autopilot, the faith that stopped moving so gradually we never noticed the stop. Whatever that settled place is, that is exactly where Paul aims this text. Put off the old self there. Be renewed in your mind there. Put on the new self there, this week, in the small and ordinary moments where following actually happens.

You learned Christ. He is not a doctrine you finished or a decision you filed away. He is a living Lord still walking, and the new self He created for you is laid out and waiting. The old clothes never fit who you are now. Put on the new ones, and follow Him.