

Created According to God

Ephesians 4:17–24

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INTRO

The month of May is always a big month in the Knoop household. We're celebrating Mother's Day today (12th). On Friday (10th), Elizabeth and I celebrated our 16th anniversary. This coming Thursday (16th) is Daniel's graduation party. At the end of the month, we will be celebrating Aukeem's 17th birthday (31st). And on Thursday this past week (9th), we celebrated Asher's birthday. He turned five years old.

One of the perks about being a toddler is that you can still coerce people into helping you get dressed in the morning. If Daniel were to ask me to help him get dressed in the morning, I would say, "No, you can put your socks on by your own self!" But, as a 5-year-old, Asher can still convince me to help him put his socks on in the morning. However, for reason, Asher still has a drawer full of socks that he wore when he was a baby. His baby socks are mixed in with his toddler socks, and so every so often, when he requests help putting his socks on, he will come with a pair of his baby socks. The problem is, **they don't fit him anymore**. Once upon a time, they fit him. Once upon a time, it made sense for him to wear them. It was fitting. But not anymore because he's not who he once was.

The same is true for those of us who are children of God. **The life that we once lived – before we knew Christ – is no longer fitting for us.** That's the **theme** of today's text (Eph 4:17–24).

CONTEXT

Paul is writing to the local churches in Ephesus to let them know how he is praying for them¹ and to remind them of **who they are in Christ** and **what it means to live as a follower of Christ**. He begins the letter by **celebrating who they are in Christ** – **just like we celebrate somebody on their birthday**. **At the Knoop house**, we go around the room and say something that is particularly special to us about the birthday person. "**You are special**..."

Well, Paul begins his letter with a list of all the things that make the children of God so incredibly special.

- You are a **saint** in Christ Jesus (1:1).
- You were **chosen** by God before the foundation of the world (1:3).
- God destined you for **adoption** before the world began (1:5).
- You have been **accepted** into the Kingdom of God (1:6).
- Through the shed blood of Christ, you have been **forgiven** of all your sins (1:7).
- Your eternity has been **sealed** by the Holy Spirit (1:13–14).
- Your salvation is the **inheritance** of Christ (1:18).
- You are **loved** with the immeasurable, incomprehensible love of Christ (3:18–19) [Rom 9:13; 1 Pet 2:9].

One of the things that makes our identity in Christ so amazing is that it is **so radically different** from who we used to be (see also Col 3:5–11). We were once...

- Dead in trespasses and sins (2:1); but now we are "alive together with Christ" (2:5).
- Children of wrath (2:3); but now we are "children of light" (5:8).
- Foreigners to God's family (2:12); but now we are "members of the household of God" (2:19).
- Strangers to God's good promises (2:12); but now we are "fellow citizens" (2:19).
- Without God and without hope (2:12; 4:18); but now we are "in Christ Jesus" (2:13).
- Far off (2:13, 17); but now we have been "brought near" (2:13, 17).
- Carried away with every new, cunning, crafty, deceitful teaching that came our way (4:14); but now we are *growing up in all things into Christ* (4:15).

¹ Eph 1:15–16; 3:1, 14–15; 6:18–20.

The first half of this letter is Paul reminding us that we are not who we once were. Therefore, he spends the second half of the letter instructing us on what it means to live as we now are: namely, as a child of God. **If** we are not who we once were, **then** we can no longer live how we once lived. To go back to the original illustration: **the clothes that we used to wear no longer fit**. The way we used to live & act & think is no longer appropriate.

As children of God, we are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that we have in Christ (4:1).

Our lives should reflect...

- The humility of Christ (4:2).
- The gentleness of Christ (4:2).
- The patience of Christ (4:2).
- The love of Christ (4:2).
- The unity of the Spirit (4:3).
- We should be using our God-given gifts to **build one another up**, to **encourage & exhort** each other in our walk with Christ (4:7–16).

And what makes this kind of lifestyle so amazing is that it's so **radically different** from the way we once lived:

- Walking according to the course of this world (2:2).
- Living under the power of wickedness (2:2).
- Filled with the spirit that works in children of disobedience (2:2).
- Conducting ourselves in the lusts of our flesh (2:3).
- Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of our worldly thinking (2:3).
- Chasing after every new teaching that blew past us (4:14) || **How we view God, ourselves, others...**
 - #Docetism, #Universalism, #Sabellianism, #Gnosticism, #Marcionism, #Modalism, #Arianism.
 - #Tritheism, #Pelagianism, #EmergentChurch, #LGBTQ, #Deconstruction, #ProChoice, #BLM...²

This is the way the world around us lives & thinks & acts & talks & dreams... which is the world that we were once part of (2:3) – but no longer. We are no longer part of this world. We're still **in** the world, but we are no longer of this world (John 17:15–16). We belong to a new Kingdom (Col 1:13). We serve a new King. We have been given a new heart (Ezek 36:26). We have a new spirit that lives within us (Ezek 36:27). In Christ, we are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17). We have been "*created according to God*" (Eph 4:24). Therefore, we should no longer live the way the world around us lives. **It's no longer fitting for us.**

I am not the least bit surprised when **my unsaved friends** use filthy language or engage in filthy conversations or pursue meaningless lifestyles.³ It's what I expect from people who don't know Jesus. **It fits them.** If your heart has not been awakened with the love and life of Jesus Christ, then it is natural for your life to reflect the deadness of your heart. A worldly lifestyle is **fitting** for someone with a dead and dark heart. But it is not **fitting** for someone who has been awakened to new life in Christ.

READ EPHESIANS 4:17–24

Therefore (οὖν) || This is the same word that Paul used in 4:1.

In other words, what he is about to say is **based on** what he has previously written.

"I testify (μαρτύρομαι) **in the Lord**" || This is what somebody would write if what they were about to say was "*a matter of great importance*". It's another way of saying, "*I insist*", "*I implore*".⁴

² **Docetism** (1st Cent.): Jesus did not have a physical body; **Universalism** (2nd Cent.): everybody is saved (#Rob Bell); **Sabellianism**: the Trinity is different manifestations of the same single being (similar to **Modalism**); **Gnosticism**: secret knowledge; **Marcionism** (2nd Cent): OT God is different from NT God; **Arianism** (4th Cent.): Jesus was created; **Tritheism**: three Gods; **Pelagianism**: earn salvation.

³ Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34; 1 Cor 5:9–11.

⁴ BDAG. See also 1 Thess 2:12; 4:1.

Don't walk like the rest of the unsaved world walks "in the futility of their mind"...⁵

~ *Ephesians 4:17*

Futility (ματαιότητα): "state of being without use or value, emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness". This is the same word that is frequently used in the Greek translation of *Ecclesiastes* to describe the "emptiness" or "vanity" of a life that is not lived with God in view.

LISTEN: you were created to know God, to enjoy God, to glorify God, to live in His presence, to walk with Him, to find your deepest happiness in Him. **Your mind was designed** to think about God, to be captivated by God, to meditate on His Word and on His ways, to process the world with His power and majesty in view, to dream big dreams for His glory...that's what your mind was created for.

IF your **mind** (νοῦς) is not oriented around God and His Word and His ways, **THEN** your thinking is ultimately futile. It's useless. It is without value.

This is not to say that unsaved people are not intelligent. This world is filled with unsaved people (*Gentiles*) who are intellectually brilliant. Paul's not saying that the world around us is stupid. **This world is filled will people who are incredibly smart.**

- *We're using self-driving tractors to plant our crops.*
- *We're implementing self-driving cars.*
- *We're putting batteries in people's hearts.*
- *We're sending people to the moon.*
- *We're taking photos of space billions of miles away.*
- *We're creating cures for all kinds of diseases.*
- *We're increasingly utilizing artificial intelligence into our daily lives.*

This world is full of people with brilliant minds. That's not in question here. The point Paul is making is that all worldly "thinking" is ultimately **empty** insofar as it ignores God. "But Paul, how can you say that their minds are futile when the world is full of the evidence of their brilliance?" To which I think Paul would answer: "**What does it matter if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul**" (**Matt 16:26**).

At **the Tower of Babel**, the world united its intellectual powers to create one of the greatest architectural advancements in human history, but they had no thought for the glory of God.⁶ Rather, their intellectual efforts were motivated by a desire to ascend to the place of God, and (in the end) it all amounted to nothing. Their thinking was futile, worthless, useless. **That's Paul's point here**: when your thinking (*your ambitions, desires, dreaming, planning, processing*) is not centered on God, it will ultimately profit you nothing.

Then Paul goes on to describe this futile thinking in **vs. 18**.⁷

- Their **understanding** is **dark**.
- Their life is **alienated** from God
 - because of their **ignorance**
 - & because of the **blindness** of their heart.

This is not a flattering description at all! We live in a culture that is so **worried about hurting people's feelings** that we can sometimes get paralyzed when it comes to saying true things that are hard to hear. **Not Paul!** He says that the mind of the world is dark, alienated, ignorant, and blind when it comes to true reality. Why? Because they have "given themselves over to **lewdness** (ἀσελγεία: sensuality, sexual indecency)". Their heart is **greedy** for things that are **dirty** (unclean) to the point that they have grown **callous** to truth & light & beauty.

⁵ Paraphrase

⁶ Gen 11.

⁷ Two participles: ἐσκοτωμένοι (*being darkened*), ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι (*being alienated*).

- *Dark. Alienated. Ignorant. Blind. Greedy. Dirty. Callous. And sexually out of control.* This is how Paul describes the world in which we live. He says that they have “*given themselves over to this*”.⁸

Often times when we hear descriptions like this (“dark”, “callous”, “alienated from the life of God”), I think our minds jump to a particular category of people: *Nero* (37–68), *Adolf Hitler* (1889–1945), *Saddam Hussein* (1937–2006) – like...*bad people*. But Paul’s not talking about a particular category of “*really bad people*”. He’s talking every single person who does not know Jesus Christ as their Savior and King.

- *What about the **doctor** who is devoting his life to helping people get better?*
- *What about the **mom** who is just trying to provide a decent life for her family?*
- *What about the **police officer** who is just trying to protect people?*
- *What about the **student** who is dreaming about making the world a better place?*

Listen closely: the purpose of your life is **not** to help people get better – or to provide a good life for your family – or protect your community – or make the world a better place... **the purpose of your life is to know** the God who made you and **to love** Him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind.⁹

- *If your highest goal is to care for your family, **then** your family is your god.*
- *If your highest goal is to make this world a better place, **then** this world is your god.*
- *If your highest goal is to stay healthy and make sure you’re ready for retirement, **then**...*
- *If your highest goal is financial security, **then**...*
- *If your greatest joy is sexual pleasure, **then**...*
 - *And that kind of thinking is futile and dark (no matter how good it sounds) because there is only one God, and He doesn’t share His glory with anybody or anything.¹⁰ What does it matter if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?*

Moms, the greatest gift you can give your children is to help them know God. Pray with them. Pray for them. Speak the Word of God over them. Disciple them in the Word of God. Don’t compromise with the world when it comes to how you raise your children. In the end, it doesn’t matter if they go to college. It doesn’t matter if they make a lot of money. It doesn’t matter how well they did in sports. It doesn’t matter if they land the dream job. These are the things that are important to “the world” because it’s all they have. But, Christian Mama, you have Christ (you have God, you have truth); give your children that. “*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the [world] walks in the futility of their mind” (4:17).*

While the world around us has its mind set on things that do not profit (1 Sam 12:21), “*you have no so learned Christ*” (4:20).

You have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him,
as the truth is in Jesus...
~ *Ephesians 4:20–21*

I love the way the NKJV translates this verse. Paul was instrumental in planting the church in Ephesus, and so he knows what they have learned. He says, “*You weren’t taught the ways of the world.¹¹ You were taught the truths of Christ. And, as you were taught the truths of Jesus, you didn’t just hear about Him... you heard Him.*” As the Word of God is spoken over you, you aren’t just hearing *about* Him; you are hearing Him. You aren’t being taught by your pastor; you are being taught by Christ. Paul says, “*You have learned Christ. You have heard Christ. You have been taught by Christ.*”

⁸ He talks the exact same way in Romans 1:18–32.

⁹ Isa 43:7; Matt 22:37; Phil 3:8.

¹⁰ Isa 42:8.

¹¹ E.g., 1 Cor 2:4.

And what does Christ teach you?

“That you **put off**, concerning your former conduct, **the old man** which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you **put on the new man** which was **created according to God**, in true righteousness and holiness.”

~ *Ephesians 4:22–24*

What does Christ teach? He teaches you that your new life was **created according to God** (*i.e., it was made to reflect God as you delight in things that are right & good & beautiful & pure & true & holy*), and so **your old life no longer fits**. Your old way of living made sense when your heart was dead and you were alienated from the life of God, but you are new creation. That old life is gone, and so **your old way of living no longer fits**. Christ teaches you to put off the old person which was growing up in the lusts of the flesh (*which continuously lie to you*) and to put on the new person which grows up in the way of God (which are right and set apart).

- **Wealth** lies to you: “*Money will make you happy.*”
- **Pornography** lies to you: “*Sexual gratification will satisfy the craving in your soul.*”
- **Success** lies to you: “*Making it to the top will fulfill your desires.*”

That’s why Paul calls them “*deceitful lusts*” (4:22).

On the contrary, Paul says, “*The truth is in Jesus*” (4:21). If you learn from Christ, this is what you will learn. If you have heard Christ, this is what you’ve heard. If you have been taught by Christ, this is what you have been taught. Truth.

- Give your mind to this.
- Devote your life to this.
- Feed this to your children & to your grandchildren.
- Buy the truth, and do not sell it.¹²

Everything else is empty intellectualism and chasing after the wind.¹³

CLOSING

Q. How do we “*put off the old person*” that once consumed our life and “*put on the new person*” which is made according to God?

A. Probably, the same way that my 5-year-old quits trying to wear socks that are appropriate for an infant:

1. Remove all the old socks from his drawer so that he no longer has access to them.
2. Fill the drawer with socks that are appropriate for his size.

1. Stop filling your heart and mind with things that belong to your old self (*e.g., music, television, social media, friend groups, super busy schedules, worldly ambitions*) ...
2. And start filling that drawer in your heart with the things of Christ (*e.g., music, relationships, daily routines, the Word, the local church*).

“Only one life will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

¹² Pro 23:23.

¹³ Eccl 1:14.