

Fact Sheet for **“The Old and the New”**
Ephesians 4:17-24

Pastor Bob Singer
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All of us like to get new clothes. Our old ones may be frayed, stained, stretched, and torn. Paul talks about putting off the old and putting on the new in Ephesians, but he wasn't talking about clothes. However, if you take what he wrote to heart you can find both happiness and satisfaction in life.

We will be considering Ephesians 4:17-24 today. Here is what we will see: Put off your old self, be renewed in your thinking, and put on the new. This is pleasing to God and where you will find true happiness and satisfaction.

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.

Now remember that the Ephesian believers were Gentiles themselves (2:11-12). Paul wrote that their walk, their life choices and their values, should not be in the same pattern that they had before becoming Christians. He said that the people of the world without Christ walk in the futility of their minds. This word “futility” has the idea of *nonsense, nothingness, emptiness, purposelessness*. This does not refer to the ability of people in general to understand scientific facts, learn a foreign language, be skilled in a craft, or teach math. It does refer to their willingness and ability to let God guide them in their moral values and conduct. Paul wrote to the Roman believers using the verbal form of this word “futile” (Romans 1:21).

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.

The words “They are darkened” show their present state of being of the world without Christ. They are alienated from true spiritual life that comes from God. And this is due to the hardness of their heart. The hardness of heart that the world has, and that those who were now the Ephesian believers once had, can only be overcome by God's intervention.

¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

The darkening of their understanding has led to callousness in their morals, their words, and their behavior. The word “sensuality” refers to living without any restraint, especially in indecent and outrageous sexual behavior or flagrant immorality. But it also includes things like lying, stealing, anger, obscene talk, slander, etc. The words “greedy to practice every kind of impurity” were an accurate assessment of that world, and are also an accurate assessment of our world today.

Now Paul's thoughts move from the world to the Ephesian believers. He wrote verses 20-24 as one sentence, and this helps us understand what he meant by these words. All these words fit together.

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,

That was not the way they learned Christ! Paul seems to be correcting a problem that really existed in the Ephesian church, or at least warning them about a problem that could exist.

His words show that, as Christians...

Their minds were no longer darkened.

They were no longer alienated from the true spiritual life in God.

Their hearts were no longer hardened.

They had heard about Christ, learned Christ and the truth that is in Christ. The truth that they already learned from Christ was to put off their old selves and put on the new.

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

In the account of the stoning of Stephen Luke uses this word translated “put off” (Acts 7:58). The Ephesian believers had already learned the truth in Christ that they were to put off the old self. That old self is corrupt through its “deceitful desires”. These deceitful desires promise joy and happiness but fail to provide it. Instead they give just the opposite. It reminds me of Satan’s words to Eve (Genesis 3:4-6). The desires of the old self are indeed deceitful. Those desires may *feel good* at the moment but they will bloom into problems if we follow them.

When we choose to put the old self back on and follow its desires, looking for something that will make us happy and satisfied, we are in only for heartache and trouble. Instead we too have been taught in Christ to put off the old self. This means that we do have the ability in Christ to put off the old self. We are not locked into the old self with no way out. We have been given this ability through the Holy Spirit (1:13-14) who is with us.

Paul is reminding the Ephesian believers of this because Christians can choose to put the old self back on again. But that only leads to futility. Instead Paul pointed out to them that they had learned in Christ of a renewal of thinking that they should pursue.

²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

Paul was reminding these Ephesian believers that as they had learned the truth in Christ they should be renewed in their minds, not continuing to live by the deceitful desires of the old self. They had been taught in Christ to put on the new self instead.

²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

When we choose to put on the new self, like putting on a new garment, we choose to listen to, learn from, and live by God’s Word. We choose to be responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit within us and not be callous to God.

There is a parallel passage in Colossians 3:8-10. In Colossians 3:10 Paul mentioned “the image” of the creator. This is a clear reference to Genesis 1:27.

^{ESV} **Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The word “image” in Genesis 1:27 is primarily a reference to God’s righteousness, along with sentience. When Adam and Eve sinned they didn’t lose the image of God, but it was severely dented. Take another look at Ephesians 4:24.

²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Although this verse doesn’t mention the image of God, and the word “likeness” doesn’t actually appear in the original, the thought of the image of God is still here. The new self is consistent with the righteousness man was first created with.

This is how I would sum up these verses:

Put off your old self, be renewed in your thinking, and put on the new. This is pleasing to God and where you will find true happiness and satisfaction.