

# Put Off, Put On

*Ephesians*

By Brandon Bernard

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Ephesians 4:20-24  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 6, 2018

## Westminster Presbyterian Church

3701 Jones Creek  
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

**Website:** [www.wpcbr.org](http://www.wpcbr.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/wpcbr](http://www.sermonaudio.com/wpcbr)

I invite you to open God's word tonight to the book of Ephesians as we continue with our study through this fine letter. Ephesians 4 and our text tonight is Ephesians 4:20-24. We will begin our reading tonight beginning with verse 17. People of God, this is the word of our God.

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Thus ends the reading of God's holy word this evening. May the Lord bless his word to us tonight.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, just as Joseph spoke to his brothers kindly, we ask tonight that we would hear your voice speaking to us kindly. Father, we ask that you would help us to be better disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ and, Father, we ask your blessing through this word tonight, that you would open our minds and hearts to its understanding that we might understand more what it should be like to be a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, what our lives should look like. And Father, I pray that you would remind us of the promises that are ours and the truths that are part of our reality as Christians, and may that, Father, spur us on in our walk with our King. Father, we trust you tonight and we trust your word and we ask that by your Spirit you would act upon our hearts in Jesus' name. Amen.*

You may be seated.

For a better understanding of our text tonight, I'd like to, first of all, begin with a little bit of a theological unfolding that I think will help situate this text in a way that will help us to understand it better.

God's justice is pure and God's justice is right and it's never impartial. When Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, God had only one option if he would, indeed, be a just God as we know that he is. He did not have multiple options but one. He was under obligation to his own nature, not merely to a passing will, but to be consistent with his own nature, he must exact the justice that is deserved. Well, this did not occur, as we know. God did not close the curtains on human history, he did not exact condemnation upon all of mankind bringing it to its utter end of destruction that is deserved because of the presence of sin, so does this mean that God chose, in some way, to curb his justice so as to compromise his nature? Did God, in some way, choose to lighten the righteous character of himself so as to not bring about that end which was obligatory to a just God?

No, it doesn't mean that he compromised his character by compromising his justice, rather it means that he has chosen, rather, to postpone that strict justice that was demanded by his character at the entrance of sin into the world. It was not a curbing of his justice or lightening of his righteousness, the key word that I think in many ways will open up the Scriptures to us on many levels, is this idea of postponement. There will come a day known as the Great Day, the Last Day, when God will unleash his perfect justice that is required to those who are the sons of Adam, but why did God choose to suspend that just sentence for a time? Why did he allow history to continue, postponing that end and that final justice that was required? It's because God had chosen in his infinite wisdom to exercise on his own free will grace towards the sons of Adam.

While his justice was not something that was the choice of his will but was obligated by the very nature of God, the extension of grace was not bound to his nature so as to require God to bestow it. Grace is something out of the free will and choice of God in his infinite wisdom to bestow grace, period. Not to mention bestowing grace upon whom he will, but to bestow grace, period, was not an obligation of God to his very nature. Justice is. Therefore God chose to submit mankind and all of the cosmos not to final destruction but rather to submit man and all of the cosmos to corruption. Instead of destruction, there was corruption. Now with this entered a whole new order of human existence. Why? Because human existence's order after the presence of sin is different than the human order prior to the presence of sin. This would be a corrupted order; this was not an order like before sin had entered the world. This would be a corrupted order, a bound and an order that is enslaved to sin.

Because you and I are children of Adam having fallen into sin, we are from birth part of this corrupted order that God has submitted all of creation to. However, in God's choosing to extend grace to the sons of Adam, this still did not excuse him from compromising his just standard. It's for this reason that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ was necessary. You see, that postponed judgment which must be meted out, was meted

out upon our Lord on the cross. Watch this carefully, the final last day wrath and last day judgment, that final judgment, was actually taken and carried forward into space and time and was placed upon and poured upon the Lord Jesus Christ so that whoever believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ has already undergone that full, final, last judgment of God in the fullness of its weight. To be in Christ is to be saved from that final judgment because Christ has already undergone that judgment, that postponed judgment. Those who do not believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ have only to await that final day of judgment when it will be poured out upon them, themselves, because justice must be meted out.

However, this union to the Lord Jesus Christ does not only apply to the cross where we can be said to have died in him, did you know that you're dead? Being united to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith means that you're united to his cross work, which means that you died when he died. But this union with the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't just apply to his cross work, it also applies to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ where we can be said to have been raised with Christ. Not only dead in him, but raised with him. Therefore all believers are not only said to have already died that last day judgment, but they are also said to have already been resurrected, resurrection life as a gift by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's for this reason that Ephesians 2, which speaks of our being dead in sin and then made alive together with Christ, is wholly linked to the resurrection. It's because of the resurrection of Christ that Ephesians 2 exists; that we are made alive together with Christ where it is then said we are created in Christ. Better put, we were recreated in Christ when we were made alive. That's resurrection life and recreation. A participant in the recreation. This is new creation language, you see, that we find in Ephesians 2, thus we have a new identity in Jesus, we are already experiencing the new creation and are participants in the new created order because we have been resurrected from within through the work of the Holy Spirit. We are new creatures, literally new creatures, participating in new resurrection, new order life. Now this doesn't mean that all the corruption is gone. We all know that we struggle with sin greatly. This means that we are no longer bound to sin, we're no longer enslaved to that corruption, we're no longer prisoners to that corruption. Now hopefully this background will help us better understand the language that Paul is using in these few verses in Ephesians 4.

If you recall the last time we were in Ephesians, we considered the many descriptives that Paul provided in verses 17 through 19 about what life looks like for those who are still under the grip of sin, enslaved to sin, under the power of sin and bondage to it, those who are just spiritually dead. In verse 17, the Scripture used this language, they live "in the futility of their mind." Their minds are futile in the way that they think about God and themselves and life. Verse 18, another descriptive is that they're "darkened" in their understanding. Their understanding does not have light. They are "alienated from the life of God," Paul goes on to say. There is no life, you see, there is spiritual death. They are alienated from the life that's found in God. They are also ignorant of the life that is in him, being blind in heart. These descriptives are all true of those who are dead in sin and in bondage to it.

This reality of spiritual death, he goes on to say in verse 19, expresses itself in a life of lewdness, a life of uncleanness, a life of wickedness, but remember that Paul is speaking predominantly to Gentiles in this little book, and he uses these strange words in verse 17, he says, do not "walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk." Well, that just doesn't make a bit of sense. How can he say this if they're Gentiles? Well, he can say this because they're not Gentiles. You see, in Christ there is no Jew and there is no Gentile. You are a part of the new creation. In Christ you're no longer a part of this created order in terms of its being bound to sin and enslaved to sin. It was when they were enslaved to their sin that they gladly walked in sin in these many ways that are described in verses 17 to 19. To walk in sin, to walk like the world, to live as though I was a slave to sin, would be to say, "I am not in Christ." To walk as though I am enslaved to sin and walking in the way of the world, it's as if to declare, "I'm not a part of the new creation. I am not a participant in resurrection life. I am still bound to my in-Adam state of bondage."

Well, this is what Paul means in verse 20 when he says, "But you have not so learned Christ." You have not so learned Christ, not like all those descriptives. This is not to have learned about Christ, you notice the text says, rather it says "have learned Christ," as being united to him personally. To give you an example of what he's talking about here because this is kind of strange language, to have learned Christ, in Colossians 1, Paul will write, "You knew the grace of God in truth, having learned it." How do you learn grace? It's one thing to learn about grace, but what does it mean to have learned grace? Is it because you go off to school and you learn merely about it? No. It's because you are a personal recipient of grace, knowing its power, knowing its effect, knowing its glorious nature, knowing its forgiving touch. It is to have tasted and seen that the Lord is good that you learned grace, not out of a textbook. And we are still learning grace, I would certainly hope, in our own lives, but the same is true here of having learned Christ. It's not having gone and gotten a textbook knowledge about him, but this is, he says, this is not the way you have learned Christ. Our hearts have not just heard about him, but notice verse 21, "you have heard Him." That's who you've heard. And your heart has "been taught by Him," Paul says in that verse, taught by him and living as a new creature we are in Christ, you see.

What is involved in having learned Christ? Well, this is where we're going to spend the next amount of our time together is looking at these three things that Paul sets before us about what it means to have learned Christ. Now these three things that are given to us are actually in the indicative, however, even though they are indicatives, statements of fact about us, as we're going to see in a moment, having put off the old man, it's an indicative, it's been put off, there also is a dimension here that I need to alert us to, even though they are indicatives, statements of fact, they also have with them an imperatival force. They're not imperatives but there is an imperatival force that is behind them and accompanies them.

Let me give you an example. Let's say that a college student is telling her mother that she needs to get some new clothes and her mother responds this way, "You have a driver's license." That's just an indicative statement, "You have a driver's license." But there is an imperatival force or an implied imperative by the mother responding that way, right? In

other words, "You have a driver's license," and the implied imperative is, "You go and drive out and get some clothes for your next semester," or whatever it might be. So as we go through these indicatives, I also want us to keep in mind there is an imperatival force that is behind it and we'll look at each of these.

The first one simply is this: this is how you've learned Christ, you have put off the old man. The old man has been put off. He's dead. At one time the old man that was corrupted and enslaved to sin was alive and loving it so, having a gigantic party, reveling in wickedness. That man, he said, has been put off. He's gone. He's dead. And that one, that spiritual lifelessness, that spiritual dead status of your heart is now alive, which we'll get to in a moment.

He says here you put off the old man, it means that you have learned that you have put off like a garment the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts. Your former conduct was full of deceitful desires, desires for sin, desires to wickedness, desires for lusts, desires of hate, desires of even becoming creative with sin, but through faith in Christ you have found that enslavement to that old man, that enslavement to that old order of life, pattern of life that is true of the spiritually dead, put off.

Well, that is an indicative. That old man is put off, but there is an imperatival force behind this. Since it is true that the old man has been put off definitively, meaning you don't keep putting the old man off and put the old man off and over and over again, no, you should however continue living out the implications of that break. You still should go on living out the implications of the fact that the old man has been put off. This is where 17 through 20 become very very helpful. This is how you ought to live out your implications, no longer walk that way, you see, in the futility of mind and with a darkened understanding or as somebody who is alienated from the life of God, who is ignorant of life and who is blind of heart. Don't live like that and walk like that, he says.

That would be the implications that come with this having the old man put off. In fact, I think the force of that imperative he gives us in 17 is helpful, do not live that way because it's not true of you. One must put off any and every lust and every desire that is not in keeping with the new life and this requires great striving, does it not? Great striving. Everything associated with the old man is who you were and it's as if Paul wants us to wake up every morning and say those words, "That's who you were. That's who you were. That's who you were." So cut off, disassociate, put away anything and everything that is not in keeping with the new life.

Well, the second thing that he tells us here that this is how you have learned Christ, is it is to be renewed in the spirit of your mind; to learn Christ means also that you are renewed in the spirit of your mind. Remember that our minds lived in futility with darkened understanding. It's not a change of behavior as much as it is there are new minds that have been given to us. Think, for instance, your neighbor. This is perhaps why your neighbor sometimes might think of you as crazy, your neighbor might think of you as misled or ignorant or just off. "Man, he or she is just off. They don't really know what real living is." New Christians face this all the time. Often they will seem very strange

suddenly to their old friends. Their old friends will say, "You know, something's like dramatically changed about you. The things we used to laugh about, we don't laugh about anymore. The things we used to talk about, we don't talk about anymore. I don't feel like I even know you anymore. It's almost like you're a new creature, like you're a new person." There has been a renewal of the spirit of the mind, you see. Why? Because the mind has been quickened. It was once dead to God and now it's alive to God, it's alive to the things of God, with a new taste and a new interest and a new appetite for new things in glorifying God in one's life. It's not just what the Christian thinks but the way the Christian thinks has changed because of this new mind.

Well, there's an imperatival force I think behind this as well, is there not? With this new mind, we are in the continual need of having our minds renewed daily. Romans 12:2, I'm sure, comes to many of our minds, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." If you know anything about that verse, the word "transformed" in Romans 12:2 comes from our English word "metamorphosis," and we're all familiar with the little cocoon that one goes into and comes out in this beautiful butterfly, right? That metamorphosis process, well, that's the process that's used here when he says, "Don't be conformed to the world but be metamorphized, be transformed by the renewing of your mind." It's a continual process but it changes into something beautiful.

Oftentimes I think in my own sanctification those wings have not sprouted, it's still in that process, it's in its little dirt-dauber look, you know? It's just that continual grind and continual process and may the Lord make it to sprout. You know, in this imperatival force train of thought, we do need to keep in mind that so long as we fill our minds with ungodliness, ungodly things, ungodly images, ungodly things that come through our ears that we hear, our mind is not being renewed. What do we allow to come into our minds? Do we guard our minds? Do we guard our minds?

Have you ever planted a plant? I think we have some new plants out there in our yard here, and perhaps this spring with this beautiful weather, maybe many of you have been working in your yards putting in new plants. What did you do to feed it? To nourish it? To, if I can use that word, renew it? Would you take a Coca-Cola and just pour it all around the base of that little plant? Or did you take fresh water and pour fresh water on it so as to renew it and bring it to life, as it were? I fear many times that when we think about our thought life and our minds being conformed as we hear Paul tell us that they need to be conformed, I wonder how often we are pouring Coke on our hearts and hoping that it will somehow sprout and be renewed and be nourished. No, we need to make every effort to guard our minds and to be transformed by the renewing of those minds.

Well, lastly, this last indicative, this is how you've learned Christ is that you've put on the new man. This, of course, is the positive side of putting off the old. To learn Christ means also that by faith in him you've put on the new man. Now there are two senses in which we are to understand this new man. This is where it gets very juicy in relation to the book of Ephesians because the book of Ephesians says a lot about man and a new man, and a new humanity.

Back in chapter 2, verse 15, we read Paul describing the church of the Lord Jesus Christ as a new created man, a new man that's not composed of a particular ethnicity, it's not composed of a particular race or even composed of a particular gender. In fact, it's a new man in which there is neither Jew, nor Greek, nor slave, nor free, nor male, nor female. It is a new man. So there's a sense in which we have been incorporated into that newly created body, that colony of heaven, the new creation society called the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A new creation society, the church.

We've been incorporated into that so there's a corporate sense that even Ephesian warrants us to see it as this new man that we are a part of as we are joined to the church of Christ, but there's also this individual and personal sense in which we find in Ephesians 2. We are his workmanship, created in Christ, again probably better put recreated in Christ is the context there because he has just spoken about coming from death to life. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. You see, this is new creation language. This is new heavens and new earth language. This is the new creation order that we are participating in as those that have been resurrected to life. We as individuals have put on the new man with this new creature status. It's for this reason this creation language is employed in this verse, indicating that we were created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now there is an imperatival force to even this indicative. We ought to live lives that are in keeping with our new creaturely status. The goals of our labors, the goals of our pursuits are for the glory of God alone. We read in Romans 13, "But on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." We're new creatures and we're called to live like new creatures. That's the imperatival force behind this, live as a new creature. The negative of that you see in verse 17, do not look like the Gentiles. So he tells us no longer to walk like that because you have put off the old creation, the spirit of your mind has been renewed, and you've put on this new creation, you have life. And I urge you, I urge you, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called.

Israel and Egypt, can you just imagine for a moment what the toll was on their bodies when they were in slavery and in bondage. They had backs that were extremely sore. I'm sure they had knees that were very weak and skin that was just sun-burned, open wounds perhaps from picking up rocks and working for the Egyptians, and when they were liberated, when God by his act of kindness liberated them from that bondage, I would imagine that they had a little bit of a hard time living as those who were free, and for some of them generations had gone by. All they knew was a slave life. All they knew was difficult hurt backs and weak knees and all that's involved in very hard labor that we know that Pharaoh put them under. They had to probably learn how to start walking upright and what it would be to live like without the back pain. There was a process that they were going through. What about their status? Their status, they had gone from slave to free, you see. Their status has changed definitively, indicatively they are free, but there still is all of this adapting to that freedom and living like a people who are free that's going to take some time.

I don't know about prisoners in jail but I would guess that whenever they are released from prison, they take off their orange coat, their orange shirt they've been wearing. They have a new status, you see, but from what I understand it's very hard sometimes for prisoners whenever they are released from prison for so many years, to adapt to what it's like to be a free man or a free woman living in a civilian state, a civilian status. Their status has changed, they're no longer in prison, they're free, there is that indicative but there is still all of that learning to be who they are.

Well, let me bring this down to probably the best illustration that coincides with our text. Let's think about Lazarus who was dead, immovable, couldn't lift a finger, and yet he was brought to life. It's interesting Charles Spurgeon once said that the story did not stop with the resurrection of Lazarus, rather we're given a little bit more of the narrative because whenever he was brought to life, they then had to unbind him and take off all of those grave clothes and unwind it once he was alive. Perhaps as they started to unwind it, that arm that was in this position and was immovable was now starting to wiggle, and then as the legs were starting to be loosened, as they began to be unbound and unwound, this leg now starts to move, and then this one. Then after a while, he was able to stretch out. Charles Spurgeon likened that to our sanctification. There is a definitiveness and an indicativeness from our going from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life and like Lazarus, we are something and someone that we were not. Now there might be stink involved, surely Lazarus was still stinking and those grave clothes were all nasty, but they are unwound and God does that wonderful sanctifying work of unwinding us so that we start moving about like we are, and we start behaving like we are, and we who are new creatures start acting like new creatures. That part of our heart that never wiggled is now starting to wiggle, you see. Life starts to show itself. Praise be to God that there is that work of the Spirit even after that definitive status has been born and wrought by the Spirit, that he still works upon us and renews us and makes us to be who we are.

I'd like to end on kind of a crass landing to sum up perhaps what's been said so far. You have a driver's license, so live like you do and go and get the clothes.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you have given us a new status, you have given us life. You have made us participants in the new creation through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and, our God, we thank you that you have united us to Jesus in his death and that you have also united us to Jesus in his resurrection so that in his death we have already undergone that last day judgment, we've already undergone that final weight of your wrath in Christ, and we have been the recipients of new life because of our resurrected Lord. O Father, we did not do anything at all to obtain this blessing. We thank you that by the freedom of your own will, you have chosen to bestow grace on the sons of Adam and you've chosen to bestow such grace upon us by faith. Father, we thank you for teaching us who we are, the indicatives of what is true of us now, yet Father, we long to see in our lives a living out all of the implications of this new reality that is ours. Father, we ask that you help us to live in the reality of that which is true about us. Help*

*us by your Spirit, we ask. Unwind us more and more and cause us to move about in the freedom and in the life that you have already granted us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*