



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4:17-24

"New Clothes"

Ephesians

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in the so-called practical section of the book where Paul is giving exhortations on how to live based upon the doctrine that he has set forth in the first three chapters, and verses 17 through 24 are a general exhortation to holiness. In the next verses, 25 through chapter 5 verse 2, he gets very specific about how we're to live the life that he exhorts us to, but here he gives a general exhortation beginning with a warning and then a reminder to them of who they are. He writes:

"This I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as the truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Now let me say just a few words about those last three verses, verses 22 through 24. They are interpreted differently by different

commentators. In fact, your translation is something of an interpretation of them. I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible and the suggestion of this interpretation is that Paul is giving a series of fresh commands. He's telling them to do three things, verse 22 to lay aside the old self and verse 23 to be renewed in the Spirit and in 24 to put on the new self. Now, that is presented as a command, as an imperative, and an imperative is a grammatical term referring to commands. That's the force of an imperative, generally.

But these verbs, those three – put off, renew, put on or lay aside, renew, put on – those are not imperatives in the Greek text; they are infinitives and we normally translate an infinitive "to" do something. I want to go or I want to learn, "to learn," "to go" is an infinitive. So it might be better to translate these expressions in a way that explains what they had been taught when they first heard the gospel. He's saying, "If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him," in other words, he's reminding them of what they heard when they first heard the gospel, and what they heard is that or they learned to put off the old man, to be renewed in the new man, and to put on the new man.

And I think that what he's doing here is reminding them of the gospel presentation that they first heard. Now, I mention that and I don't want to get into detail because we're going to cover it in some detail when we come to it in the lesson, but to put your minds in that frame of mind, he's not telling them that they are to do this now, he is saying in effect, "This is what you did when you believed the gospel, you laid aside the old man, you put on the new man. Now live in light of the people you have become when you were converted to Jesus Christ."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the time we have to study together, to open a text of Scripture and

to examine it, examine it in some detail and see how these things apply to us, to be reminded of the kind of people we are and the kind of life that we are to live. We are reminded also, Father, in our passage of the great temptations that we face in this world. The great temptations that the Ephesians faced are really no greater than those that we face. They lived in a pagan environment and we live in a very pagan environment as well. We are faced constantly with the pull of the world. It seems so attractive to us.

And yet the reality behind it all is it's not attractive at all, it's an ugly and poisonous world, and we pray, Father, that you would remind us of that and make that clear in our minds and disabuse us of any affection we might have for the old life from which we have been redeemed. May we come to a firm realization of who we are in Christ, new creatures, and live as new creatures.

Thank you for the teaching that the apostle gives us here, and we pray that you would instruct us through it. We thank you for all the blessings you've given us, and you've given us many. You've given us grace, you've given us the Holy Spirit, you've given us gifts, you've given us one another and we pray for one another, pray that you'd bless this assembly. Bless those who are sick; pray that you'd give them healing. Pray particularly at this time for Bob Messick and ask that you might heal him, continue to give him a speedy recovery. Pray for Margaret Dietrich, pray that you would give her continued recovery, and others, Father, who are sick and who are in need of your care and your mercy.

Bless our nation; pray for our leaders, that you'd give them wisdom. We pray for the people of this land, that you would bless them spiritually. Bless your church wherever it is meeting today, that it would be built up in the faith and that the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ would be proclaimed clearly and that your people would be built up in the faith, that we might go forth this week into the world, into the workplace, into the neighborhood, wherever we may be, and be good representatives of Jesus Christ. May people

see the grace that has transformed us and may they hear it in the words that we speak.

To that end, we pray your blessing upon us and bless us again as we return this evening. Bless our meeting tonight, that it would be edifying, glorifying to you. We pray these things in the Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] Many years ago, when I was in high school, I read a short story entitled "Clothes Make the Man." I'm a little vague on the details because that's been some time ago, but as I remember, it was a humorous short story of a gang of thieves who robbed a bank, and one of the members of this gang was not very bright and so they gave him the simplest job. He was to dress up like a policeman, stand outside the bank, and alert them if anyone suspicious was coming. So he was to be the watch outside and that's what he did, but as he was doing that, a strange thing happened. He liked his uniform.

And as the people walked by, they took him to be what he was dressed up to be, a policeman, and they greeted him and showed him respect. Before long, he started identifying with his uniform and began to act like a policeman. He started doing the kinds of things policemen do. He directed traffic, helped some people cross the street, so that by the time his fellow thieves came out of the bank with the loot, he had so identified with his uniform that he blew the whistle and arrested them.

Well, the point of the story wasn't that the gang underestimated the intelligence of their friend but rather they underestimated the influence of his clothes. It's just a story, but there's a grain of truth in it, and Paul indicates that in our passage when he reminds the Ephesians of the new clothes that they have put on, spiritual clothing, and their conduct is to fit that clothing.

The Christian has only two sets of clothes in this life. When we were born into this world, we were clothed with the filthy rags of unrighteousness and our conduct fit that clothing. But when we were born again, when we came to faith in Jesus Christ and we were

converted, we laid aside those old clothes and we put on new clothes, clean clothes, the clothes of righteousness. It's a way of saying that became new creatures in Christ. The problem is we are tempted very often to look back at that old suit of sin and admire it, tempted to long for the old life, and the Ephesians evidently were facing that temptation.

So Paul does essentially two things in our passage this morning. He first of all warns against adopting the ways of the old life and then he reminds them of their new life, that they are wearing new clothes, and the knowledge of that should influence their conduct.

Well, to make his point, he begins with the negative, with an admonition not to live like the Gentiles, like the pagans, and he bases this admonition on what he had taught in the previous verses, that Christ had died to make us like Himself and He has given us grace and a variety of gifts to do that. So Paul writes "therefore" – that is, "in light of what I have taught you in the previous verses, because of what you are and what you have received, no longer walk as the Gentiles walk. Don't imitate the Gentiles. Don't imitate the world around you. You are no longer part of that world. When you became a Christian, you switched paths, you changed your course, so walk no longer or live no longer as the Gentiles live."

And to underscore that point, that admonition, Paul prefaces that by saying, "I say and affirm together with the Lord." In other words, "This is not just what I am saying to you but the Lord is speaking in this as well. These are His words to you as much as they are my words." There's an urgency in what Paul is saying, there's an urgency in his words because he recognized that there was a present danger in the church, and that danger was the great pull of the world of the Gentiles, the pagan world and what that pull had upon the Ephesians.

Ephesus was a wealthy, worldly city. Most of the Christians in the church at Ephesus – in fact, the Christians throughout that region of Asia Minor were Gentiles who had come out of paganism, and because that was their background, that was their origin, they still

struggled with their former life. They still struggled with their former habits. Many probably had friends and family that were still pagans and were calling them back to the old pastimes and pleasures.

Christians today face the same temptations. The influences of the past can be very strong. The influence of old associates and friends can be very strong.

The influence of the world and the world in which we live in really differs very little from the world of Paul. We live in a neopagan day, and the influence of that day is very strong. It is very seductive. In addition to that, there is just a normal tendency in people to fit with their culture. I think that's especially true of our culture because in our day, we face so many influences such as television and radio and magazines and newspapers that give to us - constantly - powerful images.

You can't escape them. You drive down the highway and you see them on the billboard, you hear them on the radio. You see them on the advertisements when you're watching the news. Don't have to get into sitcoms and the common entertainment to see this. If you're looking at something that you would think is rather innocuous, it comes through there as well. So we're faced with powerful images and Paul's day was really the same.

They faced powerful influences and Paul understood that. So recognizing the struggle, Paul addresses it with an admonition, with a warning, and then he exposes it. The life of the unbeliever, the world, is not what it advertises itself to be, a happy, satisfying, fulfilling life. Paul says it's not that at all. It's not fulfilling, it's futile. The Gentiles, Paul says, walk in the futility of their mind. The unbeliever is a walking tragedy, so why be drawn back to that? The unbeliever thinks differently from the Christian, has different standards and goals and desires from the Christian. The thoughts of the unbeliever are futile. They are vain. They are empty. That's the sense of this word "futility."

They always meet with frustration and failure. Maybe not immediately and maybe we see great success at some point in the thoughts and the ideas and the philosophies or the goals and the achievements of the world, but ultimately they meet with failure. And that's the idea in this expression, "they walk in the futility of their minds." It all comes to nothing eventually.

Now, the Greeks took great pride in their minds, in their intellect and philosophy, and we're aware of the same kind of intellectual elitism in our own day among men who dismiss our convictions and our beliefs as naïve and unworthy of consideration. But for all of their pride and all of their confidence, Paul says of all of them, even the brightest of them – and there were many bright Gentiles in Paul's day – he says it's all futility. Ultimately, their thoughts, their aspirations, their goals, they all come to nothing. They gain some truth. They may gain a great deal of truth in certain areas of life but not ultimate truth, not ultimate meaning – even when they gain their goals.

Even when they enjoy some success in this life, economic success or whatever kind of achievement it may be, it's still futile. Their achievements ultimately come to nothing. The world of Paul's day left us some illustrations of that, and one in particular is its headless statues. You can see them in the ruins of Athens and Corinth and Ephesus and the cities around the Mediterranean. Statues of bodies with sockets between the shoulder in which a head was placed. When a man gained fame, he was honored by the city with a sculpture of his head that was placed on the statue.

That was much cheaper than making an entire statue of the man, and so they would make these stock bodies and then when one was going to be honored, they could just make a sculpture of his head and place it in the statue. Much cheaper and much more convenient because when that man who was a hero one day fell out of favor with the people or a new hero came along and took his place, they could

take his head off and dismiss it and put the new head in – had a new hero. Well, that's futility.

You can imagine how so many men longed to have a sculpture of their head right there in the middle of the marketplace of Athens or in Corinth and they get it, and then a few days later or a month later or a year later, they're out of favor and their head's gone. Someone else is being admired by the people. Well, some of those statues have survived. I don't know that very many of the heads did and we know very few of those who are honored in those statues, which shows that fame is fleeting, as is everything about this world.

Fame, wealth, strength, health, whatever it is, it's fleeting, it comes ultimately to frustration, and that's the mind of the Gentiles. Its thinking, its desires, its goals are all doomed to frustration, and so Paul warns against walking as the Gentiles walk. It's foolish because that means walking in the futility of their mind.

But Paul doesn't leave it there. He goes on in verses 18 and 19 to explain further what this futility is and why the thinking of the world is futility, why it comes to nothing. He says the Gentiles are darkened in their understanding. He doesn't mean they don't anything, that they are unintelligent, that they can't think well, that they're all stupid. Paul knew better than that. They knew a lot and men do know a lot. They have great powers of logic and reason. Paul lived in a day of great thinkers and lived in the wake of a number of great thinkers, some of the greatest men who've ever lived.

Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, Paul knew about them. He was aware that they were men of genius, that they had come to some truth, and we have men like that today. There are men today who are great lawyers and doctors and distinguished professors and men who are able to use great powers of reason and logic, but the mind without God is in spiritual darkness and as a result begins without the truth that governs all truth. Begins without the most foundational and fundamental of all truth, and if you begin without the most basic and

important of all truth, then the outcome of your thinking will be affected – affected very significantly.

Let me give an example of what I mean. If you know how to type, then you know that to type correctly, you have to put your fingers on certain keys, and if you don't put your fingers on those specific keys, if you don't begin that way, then everything that you do is going to be terribly affected by it. Now, a person may be a skilled typist, able to type a large number of words per minute, but if that person begins with his or her fingers on the wrong keys – in fact, just one key over – and that's a common problem that happens if you're not paying attention. One key over, then what you may type with your right hand may be just fine but what you've typed with your left hand is wrong, and so the whole product is affected and is ruined. The reason is because you began in the wrong place.

Well, it's the same thing with truth, it's the same in spiritual matters. David wrote in Psalm 36:9, "For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light, we see light." When we begin with the light of God, then we have truth and we understand all things. If a person begins without the light of God, however, without His truth, then he or she is in the dark. He may know math and science, may have a very active and capable mind, but he can never arrive at ultimate meaning and purpose, ultimate truth, and that's what Paul is concerned with here. He's concerned with eternal matters.

Further, Paul says, they are excluded from the life of God, they are alienated. They're not in some neutral place on some middle ground. There is no such thing. There is no neutrality in the matters of God's truth. There is no neutrality in regard to the gospel, in regard to the life of God. God lives in His people and we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, but they have none of that. God's life is either in a person or it is not in a person, and those who are in unbelief, those who are unregenerate, are without the life of God. They don't have that to enable them, to guide them, to enlighten them. They are separated, excluded, he

says, from the life of God, and Paul says that they are excluded because of the ignorance that is in them.

Sometimes ignorance is excused but not here. This is willful ignorance. They are ignorant of things that they ought to know. A psalmist, for example, says in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God." But they've rejected the most basic of revelation, that which is given in nature, general revelation. Paul develops this very thoroughly in Romans chapter 1 and the apostasy of the Gentiles and how the natural realm has declared God and yet they rejected that, and they made God in their own image and made Him into the form of four-footed creatures and crawling things, fell into idolatry, rejected the natural revelation, which is very basic and very general but they rejected that. Willful ignorance.

Paul traces that to willful unbelief. It is because of the hardness of their heart. Willful unbelief. John Stott, in his commentary, traces the logical progression of these statements that Paul makes here about – in his description of the futility of their mind and the cause/effect relationship, which he calls a downward path of sin or evil, and it begins with hardness, hardness of heart, which leads to ignorance. The consequence of that is exclusion, separation from God's life, and as a result, darkness. They have no part as a result of unbelief in the life of God and the light of God, and their lives bear the fruit of that darkness and that separation from God's life in their conduct.

Verse 19, having become callous, he says, they have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. Now, not all unbelievers live in complete moral corruption or moral abandonment. There are what I think we can call moral unbelievers, unbelievers who have wisdom about life and know how to live life, they're faithful to their wives, they're good fathers or good mothers and good citizens. Paul here is giving the natural progression of unbelief, where it naturally leads to, and describing the

Gentile life in general. There were exceptions to it but in general, this is the life of the Gentile, this is the typical pagan life.

The outward expression of sin may differ from person to person, but the lives of all unbelievers – to one degree or another – is dominated by sin. Perhaps I should say the life of every unbeliever is dominated by sin and to one degree or another, that is manifested in their conduct. Unbelief leads to sin and sin causes callousness, a lack of sensitivity, a lack of feeling about right and wrong and the result is men give themselves over to wanton immorality and violence.

We see that in our own day. In fact, just last week, last weekend, there were two incidents of violence on the North Central Expressway and they were in the news. One was not fatal but the other was. One young man who was a college student was killed when a motorist drove by and just shot him in the other car. His father was interviewed a day or so later, and he gave his explanation for why it happened. It was interesting because he said, "We've raised a generation of children that have no feeling." Paul says they're calloused.

He's saying the same thing, they've lost all sensitivity, all feeling to what is right and wrong, and so he says they give themselves over to sensuality, to self-indulgence and self-gratification.

Life in Ephesus fit Paul's description. It was a seaport city and attracted a lot of commerce and along with that a lot of vice. It was the center of the cult of the goddess Artemis or Diana and the religion that day had an influence on the moral climate of the city. Artemis was represented in the form of a woman with many breasts and her religion was one of a fertility cult. As the society lived in the shadow of that temple, it was a great temple, lived under the influence of that religion, it conformed to it. It was greatly affected and reflected the character of its religion. It was the center of this and it was a world center of the worship of this goddess.

In 1955, a section of the city was uncovered where the brothels were located and they were identified because chiseled into one of the main streets there in Ephesus was a footprint pointing to the brothels and within that footprint is the form of a prostitute. You can walk into those empty rooms and see where it all was. It was an immoral city. The Gentile, pagan world of Paul's day was a corrupt world, a world of violence, a world of immorality, a world of greed, a world no different from our own. Our society is the same kind of society, it is driven by its appetites, driven by greed, by an obsession with sex and violence, and we see it everywhere and we see it in the open.

And while it's presented to us as being very attractive, it's all an illusion. Doesn't lead to happiness and fulfillment, it results in murders and rape and wife beatings and child abuse and all kinds of exploitation and pornography and theft and a world of vice and sadness and pain. That's the reality behind the illusion, and we could go on and on about the moral declension of our society, but that's not really Paul's point.

He's not preaching against the world. He's not trying to stir up the Ephesians and galvanize them to go do something, to form a committee for a better Ephesus and try to reform the culture in which they live. He's unmasking the world in order to expose the danger of desiring it and adopting its principles and goals. Those who do adopt those goals, those who begin to walk with the Gentiles, so to speak, follow their way of life, are following those who walk in the futility of their mind, he says, and the path of that walk leads to destruction, and so he's warning against that.

He begins with this warning and this exposure of the world, and having done that, having warned against all of this, Paul then turns to the Christian and his ways in contrast to the ways of the Gentile, and in contrast to the worldly, sensual life, Paul says, "You did not learn Christ in this way." In other words, when you learned Christ, you learned a completely opposite way from all of that. But that's an

unusual way of putting it. He doesn't say you learned a thing, you learned a teaching, but you learned a person.

You learned Christ. You learned about Him, learning about His person, His work, His ways, that He is the Son of God, very God of very God, and God in our nature, the Son of man, perfect, without sin and the Savior from sin, and in learning Him, they learned the pattern of His life, the ways of His life, which become our ways. Christ is our example. He is our law. We are to follow Him. But learning Christ is not just learning doctrine. It is that, involves that, that's fundamental to it, but it's not just that, it's learning Him, it's learning Him personally, it's coming to know Him in a personal way because with faith in Christ, He comes to live with us. He comes to live within us. He's really with us.

We know Him personally. Through faith, we come to know Him and experience His life and experience His power, really. That knowledge that we have of Him and that experience we have with Him doesn't lead to the ways of the world. Doesn't lead to futility of mind and all of the practices that follow from it. Christ is not only the subject, He's not only what we learn, but He is the one who teaches us. He's the teacher. Verse 21, Paul says you have heard him. Paul doesn't mean that they heard Christ audibly but they did hear Him when they heard the gospel, when they heard the Word of God taught.

To hear the Word of God is to hear Christ speaking, which says a lot about how we are to read our Bibles and how we are to study them and the significance of Bible study. It's not merely an intellectual exercise. It is that but it's not just that. It's also a spiritual experience. We meet the Lord on the pages of Scripture and He teaches us there. It's important to remember that. It's important to remember that when we read the Scriptures so that we read them with prayer, be alert that this is not like reading a nice novel, this is reading the living Word of God that is speaking to us through the Spirit of God as He illumines the page, and so we should approach our reading of the Scripture with prayer.

We should approach our time of study, of listening to a lesson such as this, with prayer and give careful attention to it. Listen carefully to what is being taught and also listen critically. The Lord teaches us through the Scriptures and His teaching is truth because, as Paul says, truth is in Jesus, and so what we learn from the Scriptures is reliable. This is not a futility of mind that we are engaged here. This is reliable and so you're to listen, listen critically, and one way to listen critically to what is being taught in this pulpit or any pulpit is: What does that person say about Christ? Truth is in Jesus, so what's he saying about Christ? That's one way to measure the truth of what a person is saying.

Well, in the final verses, verses 22 through 24, Paul states what it was that they were taught. He summarizes it in three words: laying aside, renewing, and putting on. Now, these words have been understood as imperatives. I mentioned that in the reading of our text, and so as imperatives, they are understood as Paul giving fresh commands to lay aside the old self and put on the new self. The New American Standard Bible, which I am using, translates them in this way and of course it is true that daily we are to put off lust and anger and the sins and the habits of the old life that we have left behind, and daily we are to be putting on Christlikeness.

In fact, Paul in Romans 13:14 commands the Romans to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's not likely that that's Paul's meaning here in this passage, and I say that because the grammar doesn't support it. Normally, the imperative verb states a command, such as put off or put on or do this, but in the Greek text, these are not imperatives, they are infinitives and the infinitive very rarely expresses a command. There is only one, maybe two cases of that in the entire New Testament. Infinitives frequently express ideas like "I want to learn," "I desire to go," to do something. And often they are used exegetically.

I apologize for that term but it's a grammatical term, and what it simply means is that they are used to explain something or used to give

the content of something, and that makes good sense here. Paul is reminding the Ephesians of what they learned when they first heard the gospel from him when he was first with them and what happened when they believed it. The New International Version translates this – and I'm kind of summarizing the text, but in a sort of summary way, it says you were taught to put off your old self and put on the new self. That's what the gospel calls us to do, and that's what occurs at the time of our conversion. We put off the old self and we put on a new self.

That meaning is borne out very clearly by another statement that Paul makes, one that he gives in Colossians 3:9-10, where he gives commands based upon the change that occurred in their lives when they were converted. He writes to the Colossians in chapter 3 and verse 9, "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him." So what Paul is doing is he is giving instruction, and he is building his present commands, his fresh commands, on a past fact.

It is because they have already put off the old self when they turned to Christ in faith that he can logically command them to put away all of the practices that belonged to that old, rejected life. You're no longer that kind of person, so don't live like that. Since you've put off the old man, don't live like the old man, and it's because they've put on the new self, because they have become new creatures, that Paul can logically command them to live like new creatures. And Paul follows that same logic here in Ephesians 4. Later, in verse 25, he writes, "therefore," that is, because you have laid aside the old self and put on the new, "laying aside falsehood, speak the truth."

In other words, because you are new creatures, live like new creatures. So the verbs here, lay aside and put on, are not fresh commands which Paul is now giving to his readers but old ones which he gave when he first was with them, when he first gave them the gospel, and he reminds them of that. This is what Christ taught them, and it

reminds us that the gospel calls us to be completely different from the world and reminds us of what we did when we believed, what we became when we believed. We became new creatures. We took off the ragged, filthy garments of the old life and we put on the new, clean garment of the new life. We severed our connection with the old life and we made a new connection with Christ.

So we are no longer to consider practicing the old life or we're no longer to admire the old clothes that we took off. We can't go back to that; we're new creatures.

Charles Dickens invented some interesting characters for his novels, but one of the strangest has to be Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. She is an old woman who had been stood up on her wedding day. From that moment on, her life stopped. Everything in the house that she lived in, which was a great old house, was left just as it was on that day – in fact, just as it was at 20 minutes to 9:00 when she received the note from her fiancé that he wasn't coming. The clocks were all stopped on the same hour, even the wedding cake was left in its place in the parlor, and over the years it became covered with mold and cobwebs and infested with spiders.

She never left her house and never saw the light of day, and she remained dressed in her white wedding dress that had become faded and yellowed with time and hung on her shrunken, withered body, and she became like a living corpse. We can't imagine someone actually living that way outside of a fictional novel, and yet it's the picture of our former life. I don't know that Dickens was trying to portray that, but that's what I think it does give a good picture of. A life of darkness and decay and old, ragged clothes. But through faith we put off the rags, we left the musty darkness of death, the old life, and we stepped into the light of the new life, clean, alive, clothed in righteousness.

So why would we desire to revisit that old life? Why would we desire to relive it? To go back to the dust and decay and the darkness of the former life? That's the implied question, I think, that Paul is asking

in this. Why would we want to go back to that? But we do. We do long for it. The illusion that the world gives is still attractive to us and still alluring, but it is all an illusion, not the reality, and it is no longer for us. And that's what Paul is saying. We are new creatures. We have been freed from that and to walk, therefore, no longer as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind. We have a new life, new clothes, and we're not to stain them by walking on the filthy paths of the old life. We're to stop practicing the deeds of the old life.

And we can do that because Paul writes in verse 23 we are being renewed. Before, in the old life, he says, we were being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit. Now we are being renewed, not being corrupted. Then we were under the influence of the lusts of deceit, and now we are under the significant influence of the Holy Spirit. This verb "renewed" is a present infinitive. The others are aorists, which means they're past tense, and the significance for an infinitive is not time – that is, past time – but kind of action.

An aorist probably speaks of a particular action, maybe even a decisive action, whereas the present tense, which this word "renewed" is, speaks of a continuing action and so it speaks of something that is continually happening. It speaks of an ongoing process, and what Paul is referring to here is the work of sanctification that began at their conversion but it continues. At their conversion, they put off the old man, they put on the new man, and this new man is now being constantly, continually renewed, sanctified. It's the work that is going on within us, the work of the Holy Spirit in which He changes us, changes our attitudes and our desires.

He enlightens our minds, He empowers our wills, in order to bring us into conformity with Jesus Christ, to make us increasingly like Him. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we are being transformed, presently being transformed into the same image, the same image of Christ, from glory to glory. There is an increasing, continuing change that is going on in your life. On the other hand, in Romans 12:2, Paul

writes, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." He commands us to do something. He commands us to renew our mind. When here he says we are being renewed by the Spirit, there he says renew your mind.

The renewing of our mind doesn't occur in a vacuum. The Holy Spirit uses means to do that. Our minds are renewed as we read the Scriptures, as we study them, as we pray and ask the Lord to apply it to our lives and change us and make us like Christ. It's in that way that the Holy Spirit renews us and transforms us, as we study the Bible, as we meditate on it. As we do that, God's thoughts become our thoughts. We are taught of God and that's the material with which the Holy Spirit builds us up. That's the means and the material with which He uses to bring us to maturity and Christlikeness.

Doesn't happen at the same rate with all of us, but the Holy Spirit is constantly working in each and every one of us, every believer in Jesus Christ, and He can't be frustrated in finishing His work and bringing us into conformity to Christ. He promises to do that. He promises to complete the work that He began in you. And all of this is of grace. The reminder that the gospel calls us to put off the old self and put on the new is the reminder that men are responsible to believe, to turn from the old life, to turn from sin, and to turn to the new life, the Savior from sin, to turn to Jesus Christ. But Paul, in saying that and reminding them of that, is not suggesting that we can do this on our own power and our own ability.

No man gave birth to himself. We must be reborn, we must be born again, and Paul says in verse 24 that the new life we have, the new self that we put on through faith, is God's creation. It has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Put simply, regeneration and faith go together just as sanctification and mortification go together, or sanctification and discipline, sanctification and personal effort go together, and this is what the Ephesians had been taught, that their conversion had brought about great changes in them. They became new creatures and they were now being renewed, being built up in their new

life, in righteousness and holiness, and so that's to be reflected in their lives, in the way they walk.

They are not to be walking like the Gentiles, they are to be walking like Christ. In God's power, we are able to do that. We are able to live life in a way that's pleasing to Him, live life that He has created for us to live. Paul says that in Philippians 2:12-13, tells them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling "for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure." Work it out, and you can do that, you can bring forth the character and the life that has been given to you, has been created for you, and you can bring it out because God is at work to bring that out in you, to enable you to do that. So God is at work in us, but as children of God, children of grace, we must be working at our Christian lives.

The way we begin to do that is by realizing who we are, what we became when we believed the gospel and received Christ, and when we did that, we became new creatures, clothed in a new self. So our conduct should be consistent with our clothing. As Paul told the Christians in Rome, we died to sin, and so consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Reckon yourselves dead to sin and now live in that way.

Are you doing that? Can you say that you are alive in Christ Jesus? Have you believed in Him? Have you put off the old self and put on the new? If not, you are walking in the futility of your mind and you are headed to that ultimate futility, you are headed to final and complete destruction – not annihilation but damnation, so look to Christ. Turn to Him, believe in Him, and in so doing, lose the rags of sin and receive the clothing of righteousness, receive forgiveness and life everlasting. May God help you to do that, help you to look to Christ and if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you trusted in Him, then may He help you to realize what you are as a Christian and help you to live in a manner worthy of your calling and salvation. May He help all of us to do that.

Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the change that you have brought about in us through your work of grace, through regeneration and faith when we heard the gospel, when we believed in your Son, that in doing that, we laid aside, we put off from ourselves, what we once were, the filthy rags of unrighteousness. We changed. We stopped being the old self. We stopped being men and women who were being corrupted through the lusts of deceit. We're no longer those people. We're no longer controlled by that force, that power within us, but we have a new power, the Spirit of God.

We're new creatures governed by Him, being renewed by Him, being changed, and we thank you for that. And yet we must confess, Father, in spite of the blessing, in spite of the grace, in spite of the fact that you have enlightened our minds, our minds aren't darkened like the minds of the Gentiles, we have been given insight, we've been given light, nevertheless, Father, we confess that we long for the old life and we're tempted by it.

So we pray, Father, that you'd guard us from that. That you would continually open our eyes to the reality behind the illusion, that it's not a life of happiness but one of sadness and grief and pain. It's wrong and we've been delivered from it. Help us to live as men and women who have been delivered. Help us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have called us. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.