

***“In Christ”: The Power of Our New Identity***  
(Studies in Ephesians)

**Today: In Christ, we are given a new wardrobe**

Passages: Ephesians 4:20-29  
Luke 12:35-38

**Did you know that what you wear has a huge influence on people’s opinion of you?** Research shows that more than 80% of what someone remembers about you comes from your overall appearance and demeanour.

Think about when you meet someone for the first time; whether you like it or not, you immediately start to form judgments. In fact, research shows that we make 11 judgments about someone in the first 7 seconds of meeting them, often based on what they are wearing-- judgments about their status, income, profession, intelligence, attractiveness, whether they are someone we feel we could get along with. In the moments following that initial encounter, we then look for clues to either reinforce or alter those initial judgments.

Even the texture and lines of their clothing have suggested meaning. Soft, smooth textures invite others, promoting closeness and warmth. Whereas crisp, stiff textures tend to give off the silent message you are efficient but not particularly warm and friendly.

Clearly, **what you wear has a huge influence on people’s opinion of you!**

But, there’s something even more important for us, today, related to our study in Ephesians 4. It’s the parallel idea that **what you wear has a huge influence on how you feel about yourself!** A study at Northwestern University in 2016 examined influences that clothes have on the wearer’s psychology. The researchers distributed standard white lab coats to participants, telling some that it was a doctor’s coat and some that it was a painter’s smock. All participants performed the same task, but those wearing the ‘doctor’s coat’ were more careful and attentive. Their actions were influenced by their clothing.

We’ve all experienced this, haven’t we?! What we wear effects how we feel about ourselves. It also effects how we behave!

Think about what you will be wearing this coming week!

- Are you going to a Christmas party dressed up like Santa?- Ho, ho, ho!
- Or perhaps you're off to a BBQ down at the beach, wearing your favourite Hawaiian shirt?!
- Perhaps you have an End of Year Formal to attend...or a wedding? (From what women tell me, wearing high heels makes them feel special; elegant! I personally love wearing a suit!)
- What happens to me when I wear a hat?

In today's passage from Ephesians 4, Paul talks about "**putting on new clothes**"-- *getting dressed up in heavenly garments*. Why? He knows that **what we wear** will ultimately have an influence on (1) what we feel about ourselves and (2) how we will behave.

If you remember, for the first three chapters, Paul has been telling the Ephesian Christians that, **in Christ**, not only have they been rescued from death but He has seated them with His Son in the heavenly places, on the throne of the universe! They are now royalty! Moreover, Paul has taught them that, in Christ, they've been given a whole new wardrobe! Jesus offers to dress them in clothes that fit with their new status as children of the heavenly King.

But here's the question Paul wants them to answer: Why do they hesitate putting on the clothes that they are being offered? Why won't they dress according to their new identity? Why do they continue to walk around in their old, ragged, filthy grave clothes? Listen, again, to Paul's rebuke in verses 20-24.

**<sup>20</sup> That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup> when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;<sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds;<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

The operative word, here, is "taught". Paul had taught them. He had spoken to their minds and their hearts...but, sadly, the message hadn't fully gotten through! The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Their minds and hearts weren't able to receive what their spirits already knew to be true.

We all do it! Our spirits know the truth of our new identity in Christ. In our spirits, we know we are the children of God, seated in heaven. But it's so hard to convince the body and soul of these truths. That's why we, like the Ephesians, need to hear Paul's words of exhortation. We need to willingly change our clothing; to put off the old self and put on the new.

Why? To start with, we need to take off the old because, as Paul says in verse 22, ***"it is being corrupted by its deceitful desires."***

And we need to put on the clothes of the new self. Why? Because this heavenly clothing will influence our earthly behaviour. These heavenly clothes offered, in Christ, reflect our new identity in Him. They are clean and ironed and new and fresh. They speak about a new human race ***"created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness!"*** These are the heavenly clothes that will gradually alter the earthly attitude and behaviour of our bodies and souls!

Hence, Paul says, ***"Take off the old self... and put on the new self..."*** Live according to who you really are!

Of course, this is a moment by moment exercise! Indeed, how often do we forget to take off the old clothes and reclothe ourselves with Christ's new garments of righteousness and holiness? How often do we display attitudes and behaviour that are unbecoming to our new identity? It can happen in a blink of an eye.

Let me give you a simple example: Last week, Marilyn was telling the Advent Story for the kids. For some reason, I let my old self... that part of me that thinks it knows best and likes to control ... I let that part of me speak up, in a way that was out of turn and quite inappropriate. In that moment, I forgot to put on my new self, created to be like God. I was pathetically back to wearing my old clothes; operating from my old nature.

Of course, we all do it. But the important thing we need to remember is that we have the power to do better; to let the heavenly reality of our new identity influence us more and more frequently and regularly. We can consciously choose to take off the old and put on the new, as our spirits grow and take an increasing role in leading us into life in Christ.

**But there's another angle to this whole idea of heavenly clothing that we need to explore—that's the corporate angle.**

You see, although it's possible to read the English text in a singular way, this isn't the complete picture that Paul is developing here. As always, Paul's focus is on the church... how we, corporately, are dressed.

This, of course, fits well with Paul's metaphor of the church as "Christ's Body". Every *body* needs to be clothed, right? If the church is Christ's Body, then what sort of clothing should she be wearing? What should be our corporate *uniform*? Is there a significant apparel that we, corporately, should be wearing to convey who we are in this world? Yes! The uniform we wear is holiness and righteousness! You see, correctly understood, holiness and righteousness are essentially **relational concepts**. The relationships we have with each other are the outer garment that the world sees. It is by this garment, they make judgments about us, deciding whether or not *they like us* and *if they will join us*.

The corporate impact of a 'well-dressed church' is far greater than we can imagine. That's why Paul continues his exhortation with these words:

***<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. <sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

Be clear: Paul is not laying out some 'rules-based morality' here, as if we have to 'measure up' for God. Quite the contrary, Paul simply wants us to live according to who we already are in Christ. **It's just like wearing a nice new set of clothes!** Once you and I are finally convinced of the reality that we are already ***"seated with Christ in the heavenly realms"***; once we accept that Christ has already given us a whole new wardrobe...a heavenly one..., then all that's left for us to do is to *lean into our new identity*.

Let me finish with a quote from a very unusual source—Virginia Woolf. Woolf was an English writer, considered one of the most important modernist 20th-century authors and a pioneer in the use of *stream of consciousness* as a narrative device. In her 1928 book called *Orlando*, she wrote something that profoundly applies to today's topic.

*Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have more important offices than to merely keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us.* Virginia Woolf, [Orlando](#)

Friends, we've been given clothes that speak of our new identity in Christ. Let us put them on and wear them proudly, walking like the heavenly children of God that we already are!

In Jesus' name! Amen.

**Let's pray.**