

Notes: A New Wardrobe for the Old (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Intro: In the most profound sense possible, the Christian has undergone a change of life and wardrobe. Once he was dead in his sin. He lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind. But God had mercy and joined him by faith to his risen Savior, Jesus Christ. He raised him up to new life with Christ. Gave him a new heart and mind and spirit. Because God has put off the old life and put on the new, the believer must daily put off the old ways of thinking and behaving that correspond to the old life and he must put on the new ways of thinking and behaving which are appropriate for one who is a new creation in Christ. The urgency of this is underscored by the word “futility” (vs. 17). The way of unbelief and disobedience of God is the way of emptiness and futility despite one’s attainments and possessions. The way of faith and obedience (vs. 24) is that of fullness even if we may acquire little of what the world considers desirable.

#1: The Way of Futility (17-19). When God raises the believer to new life with Christ, he implants desires that were not there before: for God, holiness, glorifying the Lord’s name. The new mind and heart is therefore repulsed by the futile, empty existence which characterizes the unbelieving world. Noting carefully the logical connections in these phrases, we see a terrible downward path of moral and spiritual decline. Hardened hearts. How many are alienated from life with God and filled with spiritual ignorance by a hardened heart. How many obstinately refuse the light of truth God has revealed in creation, conscience, and worship and preaching. The heart is like the haunted house in every horror movie ever made. Scripture assigns the seat of sin to the human heart (Eccl 9:3; Mat. 15:19; Luk 6:45). Unless God intervenes with mercy, the heart which stubbornly resists him only becomes more hard and dark. Darkened minds. Hardness of heart leads to darkened understanding and spiritual ignorance. How strenuously Paul emphasizes the centrality of the mind in his NT letters! Why? The mind is the watchman of the soul. Sin always works through deception of the mind. It has been so since the beginning. Eve excused her disobedience of God in the garden saying: “The serpent *deceived* me and I ate.” (cf. Eph. 4:22/deceitful). The mind is the sentinel assigned to watch our souls. If your mind is persuaded (through a hard heart) to believe a sin is desirable and your affections work up an appetite for it, your “will” falls into line—the dominoes fall and the flesh bears its rotten fruit. Calloused senses (19). Hardened hearts lead to darkened minds which lead to calloused senses. Often such calloused senses turn to sensuality and impurity of sexual expression. Significantly, such individuals are described here as “giving themselves up to sensuality.” But elsewhere in the Bible, God is said to “give up” such individuals to impure lives. Three times in Romans 1 (24, 26, 28), which is the expanded version of Ephesians 4, Paul warns of this. The two emphases are not contradictory. According to his justice God may give men and women up to the debased life they have gladly chosen. He may leave them to sin as in their hearts they want to and eventually judge them as they deserve. Does this offend us? If so then we have not seen sin as the empty, offensive, and hurtful thing it really is! How may such people be rescued? God must shine the light of his truth into their otherwise darkened minds and hearts solely according to his grace—helping them see that the temporal pleasures found in worshiping the idols of sensuality and impurity pale into insignificance when compared to the surpassingly greater pleasures found in knowing him (Ps. 63:3; Phil 3:7-8).

#2: The Way of Fullness (20-24). Ungodliness is opposed to “learning Christ.” This unusual expression emphasizes that becoming a Christian involves more than merely learning *about*

Christ. It involves hearing the voice of Christ in our hearts by the Spirit working through God's word (Rom 10:17). It involves trusting in his blood shed for my sins to reconcile me to God and liberate me from callousness, darkness, and hardness. Knowing God through faith in Christ means enjoying the rich spiritual inheritance purchased for us by the payment of Christ's blood (1:11, 14, 18). How do we enjoy all God's fullness? By: the putting off of the old self. We must practice putting off the thinking and habits of the old life because God has put off their power over us. God judged our sin on his Son. He then put off the sin dominated lives we were living by raising us up with Christ to walk in newness of life (2:4-6). The power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in me to make me live differently because I am now different in my mind and heart. The putting on of the new self. We must put on the thinking and ways of the new life, because God has given us his Spirit and a new mind and heart. He is working in us to will and do his good pleasure just as he chose to before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4; Phil 2:13). The renewing of the mind. To put off the old and on the new, the Spirit must renew our minds in understanding our new identity in Christ so that we may walk accordingly. We must fill our minds with God's word in worship, prayer, study.