

EPHESIANS 4:17-32
CHANGING CLOTHES

“Clothes make the man.” (Mark Twain) There is a variation on this theme that you will find all through history – our clothes say something about us. In true Mark Twain style he added a second part “Naked people have little or no influence on society.” Let’s mull over this notion about clothes and what they say about us:

I have a friend who, when you meet him, his clothes just tell you that he is very wealthy; they ooze money. I have others who can’t be bothered and simply dress in any old way; their clothes tell us something of their attitude to life, and sometimes they seem eccentric.

We have different clothes for different situations: we receive invitations on which there is something about a dress code: black tie, smart casual; etc. Do people still have Sunday best clothes? Some men have their funeral suit; women go out of their way to find something new, suitable to wear for a wedding; then there are clothes that we wear for gardening or DIY.

Uniforms tell us something about people – this is a police person, soldier, clergy person; we see the uniform and know what the person does for a living; it’s not always as simple as that – some people use the uniform but are not what they claim to be, and are a bogus police officer, clergyman in order to con people! Clothes say things about us.

Equally, we don’t think twice about changing our clothes. We have clothes that we wear for work and when we come home we change into something different; or we’ve been at the gym or in garden and when we finish and have a shower we put on clean clothes. We just do it; it is part and parcel of life. It is odd occasion when we put dirty clothes back on again.

Paul in Ephesians 4:17-32 is writing to Christians about the way we live life. He has some things to tell us about what we say and the way we speak, about being angry, about stealing, about our attitudes to other people. There is some really good advice here about life and the way we live it and what kind of people we can and should be in almost every kind of day-to-day situation we meet in life. But he starts by challenging us about the way we think about life and does that by using picture of clothes and changing these clothes. We are to put off one way of thinking and living and put on a new way! We are to take off certain kinds of attitudes and behaviour and put on a new set of attitudes and new ways of behaving instead.

He begins with the notion that Jesus is Lord! For Christians, the most simple confession of faith is to say ‘Jesus is Lord’; it has been that way since the very beginning of the Church and it is still the same; these are simple words, yet they form the most profound confession because they commit us to make Jesus Lord of every part of life. That’s what Paul tries to show us here. There are two sides to that coin: first of all, he describes, in very general sense those who ignore Jesus: *“they are...”* (v18f) and because they don’t see that Jesus is Lord, they live life in a particular way, indulging in all kinds of lifestyle choices that are selfish and self-centred, that are wrong and harmful; there are no restraints on their behaviour. There is another way - *“You, however...”* (v20f) - a way that is centred on Christ, that focuses on Jesus as Lord, that shapes our life by His teaching. Those who confess Jesus as Lord have to live life according to truth that Jesus teaches, have to live differently, to behave differently, to speak differently, because Jesus is Lord of life. Here are two ways of thinking that are different and Jesus makes that difference.

Then Paul comes to clothes: *“You were...”* (v22) There are certain things to put off. The first thing to change is an attitude, a way of thinking: ‘the old self’ and its attitudes that are corrupted by what Paul calls ‘deceitful desires’, attitudes that are

selfish and self-centred, that don't care what we do and to hang with consequences; we are just out for a good time, a good laugh in life and we don't really care about anyone else or any constraints; anything goes as long as we're happy and we're conned into thinking that this is a good foundation for a life that is fulfilled and meaningful. That has to go; for the Christian this has no place in our way of thinking; we can't confess Jesus as Lord and think that way about life; that old way of thinking, these old attitudes have to go; they have to be put off like an old set of clothes.

In their place, there is something new to put on. Christianity is not about 'don't do this or that'; Christianity has a positive view of life that is meaningful and fulfilled and life that pleases God. So here is something positive to put on in place of the old ways we're putting off. "*to be made new...*" (vv23f) The first thing that is made new is our attitude, the way we think; there is a new way of thinking. You might see some young people wearing a wrist band with the letters WWJD on them; 'What would Jesus do?' This is a question that is key when we confess that Jesus is Lord; that's the new way of thinking about life and the way we live it; if we're not sure what to do and how to behave, there's the key question – WWJD. We read Jesus' other picture about people's lives and the building of a house on rock or sand and the key to understanding the picture is in what Jesus says about these two groups of people: "*everyone who...*" (Mt 7:24f) The wise person is one who hears what Jesus says and does it, who asks the question WWJD; the foolish person is one who hears but does nothing.

There are two different ways of thinking about life for the Christian. Which one to take? One is all about me doing what I want and is centred on my needs and my enjoyment of life and hang the consequences; the other is centred on Jesus as Lord and Christians living in way Jesus wants. There are two totally different views of life; two different sets of attitudes; two ways of thinking about life and how to live it. When baptism was first part of the life of the early Church, it was mainly a rite for adults and was done in rivers and lakes and the new Christians would come to the river and the leader of the Church would take them down into the water and bring them back out again to symbolise becoming a new person and when they came out they would often put on new clothes to add to that symbolism. Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus 'you have become new people; now live like it! Put into practice in your day-to-day living, the faith in Jesus that you profess.'

Here are some examples.

1. words we say and way we say them. There is a lot said here about words, perhaps because words are so important, the words that we speak and the way we say them. So much hurt is caused by words! Truth is important, so being truthful and honest in what we say is important; we should use words to build our relationships with people wherever we find them, that what we say will help other people, will build people up rather than knock them down. A man was dying and he gathered his friends around him; he took a pillow and emptied the feathers all over the floor and then challenged his friends to pick them up and put them back inside the pillow. 'We can't' they said. 'I know' he replied; 'so when you criticized me for no good reason, when you gossiped about me, these words are out and you can't gather them back again!' There is so much good that can be done by kind, caring positive words, words that express our love and compassion for one another, and for people in need and yet there is also so much harm that can be done by a harsh words spoken thoughtlessly. The words we say and the way we speak are so important. Here is something to put off and something to put on.

2. Share with others. This comes is a particular guise: "*he who...*" (v28) some in the new church had a dubious past, but then were converted to Christ, and they came to

know Jesus and enjoy His grace; some perhaps had been thieves. Now they are to change the way they view life; stealing is basically selfish and self-centred; 'you have something; I want it; I will take it from you, regardless of fact that it doesn't belong to me!' The Christian, rather, is to consider ways of sharing with people in need, giving rather than taking, sharing rather than stealing. So the challenge is to think about others. Something to put off and something to put on.

3. Get attitudes to other people right – There are a whole lot of attitudes talked about here, that could be worth dealing with on their own. There are times when it is right to be angry, but also times when that anger is a selfish response; for whatever reason we are angry, it must never be allowed to fester and build up into resentment against someone. Kindness and compassion are ways in which to treat other people wherever we meet them; when people hurt us or wrong us, then forgiveness is to be the quality we show. On other hand, there is no place for bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice – these attitudes are to find no place in the life of the Christian. A few yrs ago the Church of Scotland produced a book called *Believe it or not!*; there is a copy in the library; it is based on what people in Scotland said were barriers to Christian faith. There is a whole chapter centred on the way in which Christians behave and in effect, people were saying "Christianity is great; but Christians don't show very Christian attitudes!" One of key places where we need to get this right is in the way we deal with one another and other people.

Finally, here's a huge ideal for us, an aim, a goal in life. "*Be kind...*" (v32) Be like God; imitate God! God has forgiven us in Christ; so we are to forgive other people, and one another. Listen to Jesus' teaching about life and love and the way to live; follow His example. How did Jesus get on with other people? What were the qualities of His life, His relationships? There are all kinds of answers to these questions, but for all of them there is a challenge for us to be like that too. Jesus was angry when He saw wrong things and injustice, but it never became resentment. Jesus forgave the people who hurt Him, even those who crucified Him. Jesus was full of kindness and compassion to everyone He met, no matter how hard-pressed He might have felt. Jesus spoke the truth, was honest and trustworthy. Here is the way for us to live, since Jesus is Lord.

The 'P' plate: people who display this on their cars are already qualified drivers; they have already passed their driving test, but are not very experienced drivers; they are drivers who still have a lot to learn and are learning to be what they already are, qualified drivers. Should Christians wear badge like that? As Christians, we already are new people in Christ, but now we need to become new people in way we think, speak and behave. We profess that Jesus is Lord; now we need to put that into the practice of day-to-day life. None of us is perfect: we all have things to learn; some of us have old, bad habits to break; or we have attitudes that are selfish and self-centred. we need to put off all the old clothes, all the old ways, and out on new ways, ways that Jesus would do, ways that make us look like Jesus; these are clothes that no money can buy!