



**Series:** Ephesians: Life In Christ

**Date:** November 5, 2023

**Speaker:** Pastor Brett Bouldin, Students Pastor

**Text:** Ephesians 4:17-32: Christian, Put on Your Uniform

### Intro

Good morning Mercy Union County!

Y'all I am so excited to be preaching here this morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Brett and I serve as the Student Pastor here, so I oversee our middle and high school ministry at all three of our campuses. Every now and then they let me come and preach and today is that day!

This is kind of a full-circle moment for me, too, because I'm from Union County. I grew up right down the road in

Indian Trail, I went to Sun Valley middle and high school, I worked my first job at the KFC right down there on 74, I used to think I was going to be a professional bodybuilder right over there at Enterprise Gym... I've spent most of my life around these parts. And y'all let me tell you – if you knew me in middle and high school, you'd probably be shocked that I am preaching a sermon here today. But God is gracious and merciful, and I really am so honored to be here with you this morning.

The text we are going to be in is Ephesians 4:17-32 – we're going to be continuing in our Ephesians series, so if you have your Bible you can make your way over there.

As you're flipping there, let me pray for our time together.

[pray]

And as I was mulling this text over in my mind, it got me thinking about my time over at Sun Valley High School.

You see, I had a couple of claims to fame at Sun Valley High School. My first claim to fame was that my family was on a TV show that premiered on MTV and CMT – It was

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called World's Strictest Parents. Yes, that is the honest truth... you can look it up. And if you don't believe me after that you can talk to my parents who are here today...they'd be glad to tell you all about it! Don't ask me about it though.

So that was my first claim to fame.

But my second claim to fame is that I was a two-time (not one time, but two time) junior varsity basketball player. Freshman and sophomore year, baby. Big time!

So here was the thing about junior varsity basketball at Sun Valley – it was great, except for one thing. The uniforms.

I guess it was in an effort to save some money, but basically our JV uniforms were just hand-me-down jerseys and shorts from previous varsity seasons. So we had Bryan Boone wearing a 2008 jersey and shorts, and then I was sporting a 2010 extra large which nearly fell off of my 90 pound freshman body.

In fact, I think we have a picture of it. [\(show picture\)](#)

Something I remember so vividly as a JV basketball player was going to the varsity game and looking at their uniforms. These things were brand new, custom fit, tailor made. They were sharp. I couldn't wait for the day when I'd be able to suit up in one of them. But I'd have to make the team before I could wear them.

In our text today, we're going to see the Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian Church and he is talking to them about the former life, or the life that these people had before they knew and followed Jesus, and the new life, the life that they now have because of Jesus.

And to juxtapose these two ways of life, he uses a metaphor of clothing. There's the old set of clothes that the Ephesians used to wear which represents that old way of life. And then there's the new set of clothes, which represents their new life in Christ.

There's the dingy old JV uniforms. And there's the sharp new varsity uniforms.

And so, in honor of Sun Valley JV Basketball, we're going to talk about The World's Uniform and the Christian Uniform.

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Here's the main point for you to take home: **God is calling you to take off the world's uniform, which is one of emptiness and darkness, and to put on the Christian uniform, which is one of righteousness, holiness, and Christlikeness.**

### **The World's Uniform**

Let's jump right into the text. Y'all ready?

**17 Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. 19 They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.**

The first thing that we see from our text is Paul talking about the World's Uniform. There are two things that he shows us. These two things are that

**The World's Uniform is one of:**

- 1) Emptiness**
- 2) Darkness**

Let's look at these verses and flesh each one of these things out a bit.

First, the uniform of the world is one of **EMPTINESS**. Paul writes in verse 17:

**17 Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts.**

You may have heard this illustration before, but oftentimes in the scriptures, as the Gospel is about to be presented, the writer will set a dark backdrop to display the glory of God more clearly. It's almost like when you want to look at a diamond and see all of its intricacies, the jeweler will place the stone on a black velvet cloth to create that contrast and the diamond will pop.

Paul is laying out the black velvet cloth right here. He's talking about the way that those apart from Jesus (the Gentiles) live their lives on a day-to-day basis. And y'all, it's not pretty.

In fact, the first word that we see him use to describe it is this word futility. In Greek, this word means "emptiness"

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and “purposelessness.”<sup>1</sup> Day by day passes for those who don’t know Jesus and they live their lives in ways that are empty and void and without direction.

I work in student ministry so one of the questions I am becoming more and more familiar with is the question of “why?” And these students ask me these huge questions that sometimes I have no clue about!

- Why does God not just come back already?
- Why do some people never hear the Gospel?
- Why does God allow evil to happen in the world?
- Why are there no dinosaurs in the Bible?
- Why did God create boogers?

Man, that’s a science question! That’s not even my field of study!

Although these questions are often hard to answer, they’re really good because they challenge you to think about things. They make you dig down a little bit.

I’ve seen this to be especially true in having conversations with people who aren’t religious. As I’ve tried to share

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Souter, [A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 153.

Jesus with them, I’ve gone to some of those “why?” questions. And in doing that, I’ve been able to quickly discern what Paul is talking about the emptiness within unbelievers.

- **Why do you work?** So I can make money.
- **Why do you want to make money?** So I can have the means to start a family.
- **Why do you want to start a family?** (At this point the conversation is probably getting weird by the way.) Because I want to experience that love.
- **Why do you want to experience love?**

And the conversation will go on and on for some time, but at some point in that conversation, you’ll find that there’s a dead end. And if the person is honest it’ll likely end in the statement of “I don’t know.”

At the very bottom of the “why?” questions is an emptiness... a purposelessness.

Paul writes that this is the uniform that the world puts on every day. They go to school, they go to their job, they go to their gym, they save up their dollars, they start families, they cross things off their checklists, they celebrate

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holidays, they do all the things that everyone is doing... and yet they don't really know why.

And at the very bottom of all it is a reality that there is no explanation for the rhyme or reason of life... They are just existing.

One theologian writes, "The life of an unbeliever is bound up in thinking and acting in an arena of ultimate trivia. He consumes himself in the pursuit of goals that are purely selfish, in the accumulation of that which is temporary, and in looking for satisfaction in that which is intrinsically deceptive and disappointing."<sup>2</sup>

How does this happen?

How do people get to this state? Verse 18.

18 They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.

The next thing we see about the world's uniform is that it is one of **DARKNESS**.

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<sup>2</sup> John Macarthur, *The Macarthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1986) 168.

Paul writes that those who wear these uniforms have understandings that have been darkened and excluded from God (the one who James calls the Father of lights<sup>3</sup>)... and all of this it's because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.

Because of their own repeated decisions to turn against God, any remnants of light have been squelched out.

As I was studying this text, I noticed that there was almost a direct correlation between this passage and Romans chapter one, which makes sense because Paul wrote both of them. In Romans 1, Paul elaborates on this idea and he writes about how God gives over those who choose their own ways over his. This is what he writes:

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without

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<sup>3</sup> James 1:17

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excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.

Simply put, those who wear the world's uniform are God deniers. As we see in this passage of Romans, God has made himself known to the world. And he's done that through his creation.

Quick question – Have y'all seen the moon over this past week? It's been absolutely crazy. Like, the biggest moon I've ever seen. It's the perfect fall moon. **God made that.** There's no other rational explanation for how that huge ball of dirt or cheese or whatever it is is out there floating in space and lighting up our night sky.

The trees, the grass, the changing leaves, the mountains, the ocean, the air we breathe... all of it points to this grand reality of GOD.

But those who wear the uniform of the world are God deniers. "God didn't do that." They say.

Paul says that they are ignorant... They ignore clear signposts to our creator God and they come up with other explanations. They worship created things rather than the creator. And because of that, God allows their hearts to be

hardened and darkened. Ezekiel 36 calls it the **heart of stone.**<sup>4</sup>

Verse 19 of our text says:

**19 They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.**

As those who wear the uniform of the world harden their own hearts through their turning away from God, their hearts also become callous and insatiable for sin. The text says they give themselves over to promiscuity and practice every kind of evil with a desire for more and more.

I was at a conference recently and was listening to a Pastor named Trevin Wax who was speaking on this idea. He pointed out that if we 10 years ago could take our phones from today and scroll through today's feed on Youtube or TikTok or Twitter or Facebook...most of us would be disgusted by the evil and outright gross content that's on there. But today, we view these things with no problem at all. It's just a part of our lives. That's because our hearts are experiencing this callusing from the sinful world we live in.

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<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 36:26

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And those who wear the world's uniform want more and more of it.

Take the porn industry, for instance. Listen to this statistic that was posted by Axis.org in 2022:

*“The porn industry... is a global industry that nets billions of dollars per year worldwide. **About 12 percent of all websites are pornographic, 25 percent of web searches are pornographic, and tens of millions of cases of child pornography are reported each year.**”<sup>5</sup>*

Another example is the movie industry... I don't know if y'all have noticed but movie commercials keep getting scarier and scarier. I mean I'll just be sitting there watching Jeopardy with my wife and 13-month-old and then BOOM “The Exorcist: Believer” commercial comes on. And it's terrifying! And it's not just Halloween movies. They made one about Thanksgiving and the bad guy is a serial killer dressed up as a pilgrim!

Y'all the world is growing increasingly evil and there's no slowing the train down. These are just a few examples.

And the fact of the matter is that you and I, whether we'd like to admit it or not, have both worn this uniform of the

world before. There was a time when each one of us was ignorant of God. There was a time when we had chosen our ways over God's ways.

Genesis 3 tells us that sin came into the world through Adam and Eve in the garden and we inherited that sin when we were born. And because of that, the very first moment that we could pick our uniforms – The Christian uniform or the world's uniform – we picked the world's. Those old stinky hand-me-downs. Futility and darkness. Ignorance and impurity.

And Paul writes that somehow, even with how ugly the uniform of the world is... even with how evil and dark it is... every one of us in this room sometimes decides to put it back on. We go back to old sinful thoughts and dwell in them. We get angry. We say things we shouldn't say. We give opportunities to the devil. We get selfish. We look at things we shouldn't be looking at.

I mean just this past week I found myself wearing the uniform of the world. I was short-tempered with Marlee, my wife. I spoke words that tore her down rather than built her up. I didn't love her as Christ loves the church, as Ephesians 5 tells me to do. And all of a sudden I'm prepping a sermon on this text and I'm like, “Ok, God! I hear you!” Even the pastor struggles with this.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://axis.org/resource/pornography-parent-guide/>

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The Ephesian church struggled with it.

And God's call for them and his call for you is to take off that uniform of the world and put on the Christian uniform.

Look at verse 20.

**20 But that is not how you came to know Christ,**

Paul's done laying out the black velvet cloth...the jeweler is opening up the jewelry case and the diamond is being placed.

Here it is:

**20 But that is not how you came to know Christ, 21 assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.**

With the black velvet cloth of the emptiness and darkness of the world – the uniform of the world – serving as the background, Paul shows them that there's a better way... And does that by taking them right back to the Gospel.

He writes, **20 But that is not how you came to know Christ, 21 assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus,**

You remember last week when Pastor Spence mentioned that chapters 1-3 of Ephesians was all about the Ephesian church understanding what it means to be "In Christ"? This is what Paul is reminding them of here – what it means to be **in Christ**.

You see, this church had heard of a way that was far better than to continue to walk around in emptiness in darkness. They were encountered with a message that John spoke of when he wrote,

**In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it. - John 1:4-5**

Jesus, the light of the world, had come for these people to bring them out of their emptiness and darkness.

The message of the Gospel was that though they had been rebelling against God, though they had picked the uniform of the world, though they were DEAD in their sins (that's Ephesians 2), God was merciful to them and made them alive with Christ.



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Mercy Church, the diamond on the black velvet cloth is the Gospel message. We have a God who is rich in mercy towards us. We, just like the Ephesian church, have chosen our own ways against God's. We were dead in our sins and trespasses. We were clothed in the uniform of the world. We were filled with emptiness and darkness.

But God sent His very Son, Jesus, the light of the world, to die on the cross for sinners and take on the ultimate darkness that you and I deserved. But three days later Jesus rose from the dead, defeating sin and death so that we who were dead in our sins could be made alive.

The message of the Gospel is that God offers life to anyone who would place their faith in Jesus. He offers them a new uniform in place of those old filthy JV rags. He offers the Christian Uniform. And it's so much better than anything we could imagine.

Look back at verses 22-23:

...take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

This is what happens when someone becomes a Christian – the old life is put to death and the new life has come. The JV uniform is gone. It's not like God puts this new

jersey over top of that old uniform. No, he removes it. It's gone. You're on a new team.

As you take off this old way of life, God gives you a new spiritual and moral compass through the Holy Spirit coming to replace that heart of stone with a heart of flesh. That's what Paul is getting at as he talks about the renewing of the spirit of your mind.

Verse 24 is where we're going to begin to land the plane because Paul lays out three things for us to see about the Christian Uniform.

He writes:

24 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

There are three big things that Paul is about to show us about the Christian Uniform. It's that...

The Christian Uniform is one of:

- 1) Righteousness
- 1) Holiness
- 2) Christlikeness

It stands in complete contrast to the empty and dark uniform of the world. In fact as Paul is about to continue in

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our text, he basically juxtaposes the uniform of the world with the uniform of Christ.

This is what he writes:

25 Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. 26 Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and don't give the devil an opportunity. 28 Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. 29 No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. 30 And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ

You see what he is doing here? He's showing that there's a way of the world...and then there's the way of a Christian. There's a way for those who wear the uniform of the world, and there's a way for those who wear the Christian uniform.

- Don't lie, that's the uniform of the world – speak the truth to one another, that's the uniform of a Christian
- Put away unrighteous anger, uniform of the world – be angry and do not sin, uniform of a Christian

**\*\*Talk for just a minute on righteous versus unrighteous anger\*\***

- Don't give opportunities to the devil, uniform of the world
- Don't steal, uniform of the world – do honest work and share with people in what you have, uniform of a Christian
- Don't grieve the Holy Spirit, uniform of the world
- Don't be angry and have malice in your heart, uniform of the world – Be kind and compassionate, forgiving one another as you have been forgiven, uniform of a Christian

The Christian uniform stands in stark contrast to the world's uniform.

That's because as verse 24 says, it's a uniform of righteousness, holiness, and Christlikeness.

First, it's a uniform of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

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This is really important for you to understand first and foremost because the temptation for us as we hear the list of do's and don'ts, we can easily fall into the trap that if we just follow these things perfectly, then we can earn our way to God. And at the same time, if we find ourselves failing one of these things – like me this past week with Marlee – we may begin to question if we're even Christians at all in the first place. It's a slippery slope in both directions.

But that's not what righteousness is – Righteousness can be summed up in four simple words: JESUS IN MY PLACE.

If you do a quick scan of what the Bible says about righteousness, every time it's talked about it's pushing against this idea of working towards or working away from God and it being something that Jesus has done on our behalf. One of the clearest places in scripture is 2 Corinthians 5:21:

He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the **righteousness of God.** - 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus in my place.

Y'all, it's simple. Righteousness in the Gospel means that there is nothing that you can do to earn your way to God... so if you're tempted to look at this list and think you can start to check off the boxes and be more of a Christian, you're mistaken. If you're a Christian then it's because of Jesus and Jesus alone.

And so what we do because the Christian uniform is one of righteousness – we look at this list and obey it because Jesus has made us right with God, not so that he will make us right with God.

And what's so sweet is that righteousness also means that when we fail the things on this list, we don't have to wonder if we've fallen away from grace.

If we are in Christ, God has placed on us the uniform of a Christian on once and for all. That old dingy JV uniform is gone. We're righteous. Period. And so when we fail, our answer is not to despair, but repent – to turn back to God and obey him again, confidently wearing the righteousness that Jesus has given us

The Christian uniform is one of righteousness.

Verse 24 also tells us that the Christian Uniform is one of **HOLINESS.**

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The Greek word for purity here means holiness.<sup>6</sup> And for us today this is pretty straightforward: If we claim to wear the uniform of a Christian, then our lives should look like it.

Y'all, we live in a place where **cultural Christianity** is all over the place.

People claim Christ, but they speak however they want without giving a single thought to what God says about how Christians should talk. They live however they want without any thought to how God commands his children to live their lives. It doesn't ever cross their mind to obey the commands of Jesus... in fact, the word "obedience" may even offend them because it infringes upon their autonomy and independence. They don't commit to the church, the bride of Christ, because it butts into their "day of rest."

If they have a Bible, it's sitting on a shelf somewhere in their house collecting dust and if it gets opened then there's probably an Instagram picture or a text message of a passage being sent to someone because they're

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<sup>6</sup> ὁσιότης, holiness, piety.  
Alexander Souter, [\*A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament\*](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 180.

actually reading it for the approval of man rather than to hear from God.

This is everywhere, y'all. And you cannot be deceived by it. This is the uniform of the world, not the uniform of a Christian.

Paul tells us that the uniform of a Christian is one of holiness. This means that those who wear this uniform are people who are **obsessed with**, who are **committed to**, who are **devoted** to Christ.

John says, **This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. The one who says, 'I have come to know him,' and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. - 1 John 2:4**

The one who claims Christ and doesn't obey him is like me on JV telling everyone I'm on the varsity squad. It's just a bold-faced lie.

The Christian uniform is one of righteousness, which means that you can do nothing to earn your way to God. But the Christian uniform is also one of holiness, which means that when you are wearing that uniform, it's evident. Something's changed. There's a light in you that the world can see because God has filled that empty and that dark void.

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Jesus calls his disciples the light of the world.<sup>7</sup>

This is the Christian uniform.

The last thing we need to know about the Christian uniform is that it's one of **CHRISTLIKENESS**.

## Conclusion

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:14