



Series: Ephesians: Life In Christ

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Text: Ephesians 4:17-32: The Jesus Fit

Good morning! It's a joy to be with you all today. I'm Jake and I serve as one of the pastors here at Mercy. Today is an exciting day for us because it's our first time having three preachers all around the greater Charlotte area preaching the same text. We are one church in 3 locations, and this is one of the cool parts of that. God's Word shared all around our city!

I'd love to invite God's presence in today before I get started.

Prayer

Have you noticed how many gyms there are in our city? Growing up in a small town, there weren't many options for weightlifting. You either worked out at the YMCA or at a place called Roselawn. The Y was the place where most people went. They had basketball and racquetball courts, childcare, cable & free weights, and a pool. And Roselawn, that was the Gold's Gym of my hometown. The musclehead dudes that put powder on their hands, wore tank tops that didn't properly cover most of their recently shaved chest, and lifted more weight on one bar than you could gather in the free weights section of the Y, they all went to Roselawn.

Growing up, I remember thinking, "maybe someday I'll be able to lift that much weight." But lifting was never really my thing in high school. Believe it or not, my biceps USED TO BE really small.

Well, about 3 years ago I decided I would get a gym membership and try to set some PRs in the weight room. And as with most new ventures, I

had to research everything beforehand. I like to start new things, knowing a little bit about what I'm doing and making sure I'm looking the part. So I had to buy some gym shoes, get a really thick leather lifting belt, invest in some nice earbuds, and figure out what type of energy drink I wanted to have with me. And of course there's the routine. I need to know what I'm doing when I get in there. Will I do a 3 or 4 day split? Will I integrate cardio into my lifting days? Barbells or dumbbells? Cables or free weights? Smith Machine or Squat rack?

Well, when I first got my membership at Anytime Fitness in Charlotte, I was ready! I had all the gear, had watched YouTube, had the right routine, and had my fave blue razz pre-workout in a shaker bottle.

I love the feeling of becoming a new member at a gym. You feel so special! You feel motivated, excited, privileged, and eager to get after it.

But here's the thing with getting a gym membership and all the right gear, it doesn't change you.

Like you don't grow your biceps by signing up for the Y. You don't get big quads from wearing newly bought lifting shoes. No, if you want to change, you have to put in the work. You have to show up day in and day out. And it's hard. You grow muscles through resistance. You put your muscle into growth mode by using it, pushing its limit, and ultimately straining it. Transformation over time.

You know we've been in a series in the book of Ephesians where we're peering into Paul's letter to the people of God in the ancient city of Ephesus. In chapters 1-3, Paul reminds the church of their identity in Christ. And in the back half of the book, we're going to learn about the implications that this identity should have on the WAY WE LIVE. Paul is getting to the "so what" part of his letter. In light of what is true of you in Christ, live THIS way. In light of their new identity, the Gentiles are now members of God's family. And this should have HUGE implications on the way they live!

Following Jesus begins with a decision to believe in Him. It's as simple as that. Anyone can make this decision as long as it's called today. But truly

believing in Jesus changes everything. Even though our status is immediately changed: lost -> saved, broken -> redeemed, sinner -> righteous, orphan -> adopted, we are reminded all throughout the scriptures that following God changes the way we live. In a similar way that getting a membership at a gym isn't the only step in getting in shape, believing in the good news isn't the only step in becoming like Jesus. Transformation over time.

And today's passage is going to press in on this idea that sometimes we return to our pre-gym-membership habits by dipping back into the old ways. And the call of Paul is going to be both practical and challenging. He's going to tell us that we are to walk with Jesus by removal, renewal, and putting on.

Well today, we're picking up back in chapter 4 verse 17. This is the Word of the Lord.

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.

Listen to these words,

17 "You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts."

Paul's painting a dark picture of what life was like before Christ. The church in Ephesus was made up primarily of gentiles, and to be a gentile at this time meant to not be a part of God's redeemed people. When you hear "gentiles" here, think of a non-christian. Think lost. Think pagan.

Imagine the emotional impact of their having been adopted OUT of this way of living. Look at the words Paul uses and feel with them the emotion they would have evoked in this culturally Gentile audience.

Futility (v 17), darkened (18), excluded (18), ignorance, hardness of heart (18), calloused,

promiscuous, impure, desirous of more and more (19)

And before we go thinking that this isn't us, let us be reminded that this isn't too different than the way of our day - the American way. The 21st century way. The Charlotte way. We too chase after things that our wrong thinking leads us toward. The futility of our minds leads us to making moral compromises with the content we take in, to chasing after idols like wealth, notoriety, power, and gratification of our desire for more. Oh the insatiable desire for more! Calloused, darkened, ignorant. We too were once as this first century gentile people and we too were rescued in our adoption out of this!

But Paul doesn't stop here. Instead, he reminds this church in verse 20 that this WAS the former way. Look with me at verse 20.

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

This was how you once walked. But you have come to know a new way. Because of Christ, you have been changed and now you can walk differently.

Walking with Jesus is the way out of the former way. Paul is using personal language, "You heard about and were taught by him". This knowing of Christ is personal and relational. Not simply a mental understanding of him. A correct mental assent of the story of Jesus isn't enough.

Listen church, theological precision isn't enough for conversion, it isn't enough for getting into God's kingdom!¹ Belief in Jesus is about trust-relational trust. And this trust comes from knowing Jesus personally. When we truly see Jesus for the first time, when the Spirit illumines the second person of the Godhead, when the Father reveals Himself in the Son, we are confronted with a choice. A choice as old as time.

¹ James 2:19. & Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, vol. 10, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Eph 4:20–24.

The choice to believe is a choice to trust. A choice to follow Jesus and walk as He walks. Have you trusted God? Will you trust God?

Listen, if you're in this room and you've never trusted in Jesus, this message won't be entirely for you. But we want to help you take your next step, and for you, that's to put your trust in Jesus for the first time! But please don't tune out yet, because my hope is to show you that we Christians are messed up and that we don't always live like Christians. And hopefully, this call to Christians who don't always live like Christians will help remove a potential barrier that you might have to trusting in Jesus.

Paul's audience HAD ALREADY trusted Jesus. And that's what He's saying. They HAVE converted. He's writing to Jesus people. He's writing to a local church. He's talking to Christians like most of us. But they've slipped into the old ways. They've gone to their former Gentile way. And you and I do this too, do we not? We slip up. We sin. We go backwards. One of the greatest deterrents to the non-christian world becoming Christians is the hypocrisy of Christians. We act like Christians on

Sunday when we're at church singing, praying, and bringing our Bible. But then sometimes we leave it all at the door and go to our workplaces, homes, neighborhoods and act just like we did before Jesus.

And, while it is sometimes this way, it shouldn't be so. And that's what Paul's getting at. You have been washed. You have been changed. You have heard and been taught to remove, renew, and to put on.

And so it is with us. We need to be reminded, like this church, yet again that we are not our former selves, but instead, we've been made new. And this newness is both past, present, and future. We were made new (2 Cor 5:17), are being made new (Col 3:8-14), and will be made new (Eph 4:13; Rom 8:29; Phil. 2:12). Transformation over time.

And this brings me to our main point for today. We are to:

Walk with Jesus by removal, renewal, and putting on

This was the way we came to know Him initially and it's the way we walk in Him continually. This is baptism language. When we become a part of God's family, the old self passes away and dies. We are no longer enslaved to our sinful nature. As we dip into the water, we put to death our sin just as Christ died. As the water renews us, so the Spirit transforms us from the inside out. We then are brought out of the water symbolizing Jesus' resurrection. This is the putting on of the new man. New and refreshed, we begin to walk in obedience to our new Master. In salvation, we become free to walk differently.

But this process doesn't just happen once. While we may only get baptized once, we are to walk differently every day thereafter. We need ongoing removal of the old, renewal by the Spirit, and putting on of the new.

It is possible for us to resort to the former way. The gentile way. The American way. The way before we were before.

12:33

*ILLUSTRATION*²

Think of it like this. Who likes Disney?

Well arguably, Disney's most popular princess story is a classic rags-to-riches story. We love these kinds of stories. The story of a young girl who tragically loses her mother and finds herself the unloved stepdaughter and stepsister in a home where she's reduced to servant status. She's dressed in rags and tasked with doing all of the dirty work of this household.

Well, word gets out that there's a King nearby looking for a beautiful princess to marry his son and become the new queen. This young servant maiden, Cinderella, knows that she can't afford to buy a dress and that her evil stepmother will never let her go to the ball. Since she can't go, she won't meet the prince. And if she doesn't meet the prince, then she can't become the princess.

Well, the fairy tale goes as they do and Cinderella

² <https://www.thedisneyclassics.com/blog/disney-princess-leader>

is magically clothed with a beautiful one-of-a-kind infamous blue dress. She makes it to the ball. She dances with the prince. Sparks fly. Chemistry is strong! And despite an unfortunate misplacement of a glass slipper, and the stroke of midnight forcing her back into her prison of a home, Cinderella is pursued in a classic love story by her prince. She's brought to the new kingdom where she lives happily ever after!

While this story is made up and glass slippers seem more dangerous than luxurious, I share it because there's something inherent in this story that makes us all agree that it would be absurd for Cinderella to PURPOSEFULLY return to her stepmother's enslavement, put back on her rags, and hand over her crown in exchange for a maid's bonnet.

This is what Paul's saying to this church. You have been redeemed. You've been made new. So returning to the old self, putting on the old proverbial clothes is absurd. And it's not the way you learned. No, the cloak of sin was removed in Christ. The Spirit renewed your minds, in Christ. And you have been given a new outfit, the one

that makes you look like Christ full of righteousness and purity!

Friends, how often are you returning to the clothing of sin. Take it off, be renewed, and put on the new self! This is the way to WALK with Jesus.

But what does this actually mean? Like Jake, I get that we're not supposed to walk in the former way and that we're supposed to be new, but what does this actually mean?

It is often said that good preachers always give an application. After all, if we're sitting under God's Word, we want to be changed by it. Right? Well, Paul himself is a good preacher and he knows that the people of this church also need to know HOW. How do we do this?

In a really practical way, Paul is going to address 5 tangible ways of taking off and putting on. He'll do this with 5 contrasts. 5 old things to take off and 5 new things to put on.

In honor of Paul's clothing reference, we're going to call this section, the Jesus Fit!

Now if you're like me, you might not know what this means. My middle school children are teaching me all the new cool words. And apparently your "Fit" is slang for your "outfit." But it's cooler to say fit. And a small part of me wants to be cool. So, we're going to call our new Jesus outfit our Jesus Fit. Got it?!

What does it look like for us to take off our rags of wickedness and to put on our robes of righteousness? Well, let's take a look and see

Starting in verse 25.

25 Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor,, because we are members of one another.

Our first article in our Jesus Fit is to **take off Deception and put on Truth**³

In the Greek, Paul's saying. Stop the cap, speak the truth.

³ Language for main ideas comes from: Walter L. Liefeld, [Ephesians](#), vol. 10, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Eph 4:31-5:2.

"Put away lying, speak the truth." Why? Because we are members of one another. We heard earlier in verse 15 the value of speaking the truth in love. It literally builds up the body. Lying destroys. Telling the truth in love builds. And when he says we're members of one another, he's using that adoption language from chapter 1 and 2. We are all one family- gentile & jew, male and female, middle schooler and empty nester, african american & chinese american, married and single. And deception tears all this apart.

So we must put off deception and put on truth. The Bible calls Satan the Father of Lies and God the Truth. There are few things more antithetical to God's character than deception.

And you might think, I'm not a liar. But what about exaggerating to make yourself look better. I know I do this. We tell stories where we represent ourself as the hero who did little to no wrong. What about cheating on a test or saying we read a book for our class when we actually didn't? There needs to be no room for deception in God's redeemed people.

When we walk in our Jesus Fit, we are characterized by integrity. This brings great flourishing to the whole family of God. Whether in a courtroom or a dinner table, Christians should be people of their word. As Jesus tells us in Matthew 5, our “yes should be yes” and “no should be no.” (Matt 5:37).

So we must take off deception and put on truth.

Paul continues in verse 26.

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.

Our second article in our Jesus Fit is to take off Anger to put on Peace

“Be angry and do not sin.”

Anger itself doesn't equal sin, there's such a thing as holy anger. But so often our anger leads to sin. Does it not? Especially when it is ignored, suppressed, or allowed to fester for too long. There

are studies that show that suppressed anger can actually lead to not just depression but a disease that has caused some people to experience a sensation described as having “flames in their bodies.”⁴ This adds a whole new dimension to “hot with anger.”

Paul knows anger can result in sin, so he challenges the Ephesians and us to deal with our anger with an expedient pursuit of peace. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” This means, when we're following Jesus, we don't let our anger sit like we did before Jesus. We deal with it by pursuing peace. If our anger is unholy, then we may need to forgive, we may need to repent, we may need to talk through it with the person we're angry towards. If our anger is in response to sin, we pursue peace through prayer to God. We ask Him to search us and show us if there is a wayward way to our anger. And we ask what He would have us to do. Maybe He is angry too. And we are to be a change agent to right the wrong that we're angry about. This is a way to be a peacemaker. Pursuing justice and mercy is a way of bringing peace.

⁴ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2021.637029/full>

So we must take off anger and put on peace.

Pick back up with me in verse 28

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.

Our third article in our Jesus Fit is to take off Stealing and put on Giving

Paul continues by commenting on how a thief must no longer steal but instead he must get a job doing honest work. And with his new wages that he's earned, become a giver. A sharer of his earnings.

For many of us, we don't think of ourselves as thieves. And so something like this comes up in scripture and we move beyond it. But as one of your pastors, I want to challenge you to stop and consider for just a moment how you may be prone to stealing in ways that you've grown accustomed to.

In its most simple form, stealing is taking something that's not yours without permission. And maybe the easiest thing to steal and never get caught is time. Maybe you work somewhere as an employee. Have you ever left work early without permission? Have you ever misrepresented the amount of work a certain project took you and overbilled? Have you ever been working from home but not actually working?

You might think, Jake you're really splitting hairs here. My boss is cool. She doesn't care that I'm not working all the time, she just wants me to get my work done, which I do.

Maybe so. But does your boss know how much extra time you actually have to help with other projects? Or to take on more work? Have you two agreed that you can just be done whenever you're done with a certain set of tasks?

If we're Jesus people, this means we won't walk the way we used to walk. Imagine if you thought like this instead- *I used to steal from my work, but then I came to know Jesus and He's been changing me. I want to be an honest person and*

if I'm honest, I can take more on. I can take off some of the workload that my teammates aren't able to complete. I can give more.

This is what Paul is saying. From thief to philanthropist. From taker to giver. "The Christian motive for earning is not merely to have enough for oneself and one's own, and then perhaps for comforts and luxuries, but to have in order to give to the needy. Giving becomes the motive for getting"⁵

Imagine a world where Christians worked with this mindset! What could happen in a city like Charlotte if even just our church worked this way?

We must take off stealing and put on giving.

Paul continues

29 No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up

⁵ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 141.

someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

Our fourth article in our Jesus Fit is to **take off Destructive Words and put on Constructive Words**

You can start to see a pattern here. Paul is riffing further on this idea of the way that a Christian should contribute. This time it's not with physical resources but with words. Christians shouldn't use their mouth for destruction but for construction.

In James chapter 3, James tells us that the tongue is powerful. He likens it to a rudder that steers a massive ship through the water. Or a spark that ignites into a forest fire.

But not for Jesus people. No for us, the tongue is to be used to build. You can tear down or you can build up.

Maybe for you, this is where you need to put in some work on taking off and putting on. Consider your words just this last week. It's said that the average person speaks more than 10,000 words a

day⁶. Well, that's about a novel a week just in the words you've spoken. If you took inventory of those words, I'm sure many would be filler and rendered without much value. But how many would be destructive? How many of your words tear down?

And before we go and let ourselves off the hook thinking that because we don't cuss a bunch or at all that we don't do this. Friends, if we're honest. There's all kinds of FOUL words that we let come out of our mouths. How do you talk about people when they're not around? When you're with your friends and that one really difficult person is there, you speak a certain way. But what do you say when they leave? Do you gossip? Are you slanderous?

Wife in the room, How do you talk about your husband to your friends? Do you emphasize his weaknesses to them? Do you hide FOUL language under the mask of "friendship" or "community?" Or husband, same question? Do you ever vent about your wife to your friends?

⁶ <https://time.com/2992051/women-talk-more-study/>

Imagine what could happen if the Jesus people of Mercy started writing novels with their words that constructed stronger people through encouragement, honor, and gratitude. Imagine if we wrote novels that gave grace to those who heard!

What a community we would be!

Paul wraps up this section of our letter with these words. Picking up in verse 31

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.

Wow! This is no small order. And we're going to take the next 45 mins to unpack each element of this last article of our Jesus Fit. Haha! Just kidding!

Our last article is to **take off the Harsh and put on the Gentle**

Paul spouts off six unpleasant attitudes to take off and then he tells his readers what to put on instead. This is the pattern. Off with the old and on with the new.

Take off- bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, slander, and malice. Put on kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. I think that Paul's getting at the need to take off what's harsh and destructive to the community and the people of God and to put on what is gentle and ultimately loving.

And for us, the same is true today. If we are to walk in the Jesus way, we must take off our harsh qualities and be clothed in the gentleness that comes from being like Jesus. From being WITH Jesus. In Matthew 11, He describes his yoke as easy, His burden as light, and Himself as gentle and lowly. As Jesus people we must take off the Harsh and put on the Gentle.

As I land this plane, I want to highlight verse 30, which we skipped over earlier.

30 And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.

There's great theological richness in just this simple verse. Commentators are uncertain why Paul is putting this particular command in the middle of his 5 contrasts. It's almost as if Paul was caught up in the passion of what he was saying and drops in this one-liner to punctuate his point.

I think he's saying that when we walk in the former way, the Gentile way, the way we were before we believed in Jesus, we grieve the Spirit. This language is personal. The Spirit is a person of God. He is grieved when we sin.⁷ Pain, sorrow, distress come upon God's Spirit when we sin. Even beyond the grief we cause God, when Christians sin, it hurts people. This is why church hurt is such a big issue for many of you. It's not as it should be. So Paul is saying, "Don't walk in the former way because this grieves the Spirit!"

But the idea doesn't stop there. Paul reminds his readers as he did in chapter 1 (v13-14) that the Spirit has been given to us as a seal.

⁷John R. W. Stott, [*God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 189.

Let's go back to the Cinderella story for a moment. Even though it's entirely possible for us to walk back to the place of the evil stepmother, the place of our imprisonment, the place of our captivity to sinful living, to the futility, darkness, the hardness of heart, impurity, and strap on our rags of wickedness. And even though we sometimes do this, there's something different about the redeemed. A mark, a symbol, a proof that change has begun. It's as if Cinderella has been permanently marked with the sign of the kingdom of her prince. And church, if you are in Christ, this is true of you today! Even though we sometimes return to the former way, we are MARKED with the Spirit. You are sealed until that day the Prince of Peace comes looking for you. He will come on the clouds, with fire in His eyes, looking for His bride. And He will gather her up and there will be a great wedding! A feast! And forevermore we will walk in His Kingdom face to face with our Redeemer! Hallelujah!! What a day that will be!

The hope of this passage isn't in earning our way. We don't earn our way by putting on our Jesus Fit. The seal of the Spirit comes BEFORE we've walked

with Jesus. Transformation over time. And the whole time, His Spirit is our guarantee that the good work He started in us, He will complete on the day of redemption.

So in the meantime, let us not grieve the Spirit by walking in the former way, but let us together, as newly adopted brothers and sisters, walk with Jesus by removal of the old, renewal by the Spirit, and through putting on the new!

Let me pray for us!