

WEEK 5

“Taking Off, Putting On”

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:21

The Clothes You Keep Reaching For

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Most of us have something in our closet we should have gotten rid of years ago. A shirt from a different season of life. A pair of shoes that don't fit anymore. We keep them around not because we wear them, but because letting them go requires acknowledging that who we were then is not who we are now.

Paul's take-off/put-on language works the same way. The old self isn't just bad behavior. It's a whole way of being — a way of moving through the world oriented by self-interest, deceitful desires, the relentless pursuit of what feels good right now regardless of what it costs later. And Paul says: take it off. Not minimize it. Not manage it. Take it off, the way you take off clothes that no longer belong to who you are.

The reason this is hard isn't that we don't know what needs to come off. Most of us know exactly what it is. The reason it's hard is that the old self feels familiar. It fits in the way that things you've worn for years fit — worn in, comfortable, easy to reach for without thinking.

But Paul says the new self has already been created. It's not something you're waiting to receive. It exists. It was created in Christ Jesus to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. The wardrobe has already been restocked. The question is which set of clothes you keep reaching for.

Transformation isn't a feeling that comes over you. It's a decision you make over and over again. Take off the old. Put on the new. Not once. Every day. Some days every hour. But the new self is real, and it fits better than the old one ever did.

Personal Response

- What is the specific thing Paul is asking you to take off? Name it as honestly as you can. Not a category — the actual thing.
- Why do you keep reaching for it? What does it give you that you're afraid you won't find anywhere else?
- Ask God to help you put it down today. Not forever — just today. And ask him to show you what putting on the new self looks like in the specific situation in front of you.

What Your Words Are Building

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

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.

Paul doesn't say avoid bad words. He says avoid unwholesome ones. The Greek word he uses — *sapros* — means rotten. The image is of fruit that's gone bad. It looks fine from the outside but has nothing good left inside. And when you bite into it, the rot spreads.

Words work the same way. You can say technically true things in a tone that rots a relationship. You can use acceptable language to deliver devastating messages. You can speak without profanity and still tear someone down completely. Paul isn't giving a list of forbidden words. He's asking about the function of your speech. Is it building? Or is it rotting?

The alternative he offers is specific: only what is "helpful for building others up according to their needs." Three things packed into one phrase. Helpful — is it actually useful? Building up — does it leave the person stronger? According to their needs — is it calibrated to what they actually need, not what I want to say?

That last piece is the hardest. Most of our unhelpful speech comes from saying what we want to say rather than what the other person needs to hear. We unload our frustration. We share our opinion when it wasn't asked for. We say the thing that makes us feel better rather than the thing that helps them. Paul says the test of our words isn't how they feel to say. It's what they do to the person who hears them.

Think about the people you spent time with today, or will tomorrow. When they walk away from a conversation with you, what have your words built in them? What have they left behind?

Personal Response

- Think of one person in your life who consistently leaves you feeling built up after a conversation. What do they do with their words that creates that effect?
- Think of a recent conversation where your words did more tearing down than building up. What was driving that?
- Ask God to make you aware today of the effect your words are having on the people around you. Ask him to help you speak according to their needs rather than your own.

You Are Light

Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV)

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Read that verse carefully. Paul doesn't say you were in darkness. He says you were darkness. And he doesn't say you are in the light. He says you are light. Those aren't descriptions of where you've been and where you're standing. They're descriptions of what you are.

This is one of the most complete identity statements in Ephesians, and it's easy to skip over because it comes embedded in a list of practical instructions. But Paul is doing the same thing here he did in chapters 1–2: establishing what is true before telling you how to live from it. You are light. Not “you could be” or “you should try to be.” You are.

Now consider what light does. It doesn't try to illuminate. It doesn't strategize about the best way to push back the darkness. It simply is what it is, and the darkness responds accordingly. Light doesn't coexist with darkness. It displaces it. Not through effort. Through presence.

Paul's instruction — “live as children of light” — is simply asking you to be consistent with what you already are. Not to perform brightness. Not to manufacture goodness. But to stop living in ways that are inconsistent with the nature you've been given. The fruit of the light, he says, consists in goodness, righteousness, and truth. Those aren't things you produce by trying harder. They're what grows naturally when light is doing what light does.

The question Paul leaves you with is a simple and penetrating one: you are light — are you living like it? Not in some areas. Not when it's convenient. In the places where it costs something. In the relationships where darkness would be easier. In the moments where no one would notice if you didn't bother.

You are light. Live accordingly.

Personal Response

- Where in your life right now is there the biggest gap between who Paul says you are (light) and how you're actually living? Name it honestly.
- What would it look like today to simply be consistent with what you already are — not to perform, but to stop hiding?
- Ask God to help you live as light in one specific situation this week. Ask him to show you where your presence is meant to displace something.