Living as the New Person We Are in Christ

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 4:17–24 is one of the most practical passages in all of Ephesians because it shows us how the gospel actually changes the way we think and live. And I want you to know right from the start that these aren't just biblical principles I've studied…they're truths God has used, and continues to use, to transform my life. I'm learning more and more what it means to surrender my will to His, remember who I am in Christ, and let His Word renew my mind and reshape the way I think and live.

Scripture gives us many reminders that, as Christians, we are called to be different from the world. But everywhere we turn today, we're being told to look within ourselves to discover who we are. We hear things like, *"Follow your heart. Trust your feelings. Do what makes you happy."* The message is that our feelings can tell us who we are and what is true about us. But Scripture tells us to look somewhere else—to God and His unchanging Word. And that matters because Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"*

Before we can understand our passage for today, we need to understand who we are in Christ. Remember, if you have received Christ, Ephesians 1:5–7 declares that you have been adopted as God's child. You are accepted in the Beloved, redeemed through His blood, and forgiven of your sins according to the riches of God's grace. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, you belong to Him. You are God's beloved child, fully accepted

and secure in His grace. So the question becomes: How do we live according to that identity when our feelings and culture tell us something different?

To better illustrate this, imagine a pilot flying through a dense storm. The pilot's feelings and internal senses may tell him that the plane is flying completely level, while at the same time his stomach feels uneasy and panicked. But the cockpit's instrument panel—the objective source of information—shows that the plane is actually tilted and losing altitude. If the pilot trusts his feelings rather than his instruments, he could crash. But if he trusts the instruments, he can correct the course and fly safely.

In a similar way, God's Word is our instrument panel. Our feelings aren't always reliable. When our feelings or desires conflict with God's Word, we bring them under Christ's authority. Our identity rests not on how we feel, but on the unchanging truth of what God says about us.

As we work through Ephesians 4:17–24, we'll follow Paul's progression: the way we once walked, putting off the old self, being renewed in our minds by God's Word, and putting on the new self. Throughout this process, we'll see our need to abide in Jesus and depend on the Holy Spirit—not our own strength—to bring about real change. Then we'll make it practical.

So, with that roadmap in mind, let's begin where Paul begins—not with what we need to do, but with what we need to leave behind. Before Paul tells us to put off the old self, he

reminds us of the way we once walked apart from Christ. He wants us to understand the old pattern before he shows us the new one.

The Way We Once Walked

And this is exactly where Paul begins in Ephesians 4:17–19: *"You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."*

Paul is describing a way of life that is separated from God. And notice where he begins: the mind. Their thinking is futile. Their understanding is darkened. Their hearts have become hardened. And when our thinking and hearts are separated from God and His truth, it inevitably affects the way we live. What we believe begins to shape how we think, how we respond, and ultimately how we live.

There is a progression here: Futile thinking → darkened understanding → hardened heart → sinful living. Have you noticed that sin promises freedom, satisfaction, or relief, but it ultimately brings bondage and never delivers what it promises. Paul isn't merely saying, "Don't behave like the world." He is getting underneath the behavior and showing us what produces the behavior.

And notice the contrast beginning in verse 20: *"But that is not the way you learned Christ!"* What a beautiful contrast. Paul is saying, in essence, that is not who you are anymore. You have learned Christ. You have been taught the truth that is in Jesus. You

have been given a new identity. And now, because of who you are in Christ, something must change.

PUT OFF, BE RENEWED, PUT ON

That brings us to verses 22–24. But before we read that portion of Scripture, I want to make one important distinction: There is a difference between our standing before God and our growth in Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, He gives us a new standing. Because of Christ's finished work on the cross, we are forgiven, accepted, and declared righteous before God. That standing is secure. It doesn't rise and fall based on how well we did today.

But there is also a lifelong process called progressive sanctification—the work of the Holy Spirit in which God increasingly changes our thoughts, desires, and behavior so that our lives increasingly reflect Jesus. Our growth does not earn our standing in Christ; our growth flows out of it. Because we are united to Christ, the chains of our old life are broken. As Romans 6:18 says, *"having been set free from sin, [we] have become slaves of righteousness."* We are no longer under sin's ownership; we have been set free to belong to Christ and walk in that freedom from sin.

John Stott gives us an important perspective here. He points out that recreation—what God does—and repentance—what we do by His grace—belong together and cannot be separated. Putting off the old self and putting on the new go hand in hand with an abiding relationship with Christ. This isn't simply about trying harder. God is at work in us, and we respond by His grace as we depend on Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, verses 22–24: *"to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* Look at the progression: Put off → be renewed → put on. And notice the middle. Paul doesn't simply say, "Put off the old and put on the new." He says, "be renewed in the spirit of your minds."

Why? Because God changes us from the inside out. Our thoughts, beliefs, desires, emotions, and behaviors are connected. The old way of thinking can deceive us, making what is wrong seem right or what is untrue seem true. And as discussed, what we believe eventually affects how we respond and how we live. So Paul tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

And an essential part of this renewing of our minds is learning to surrender to God. Before we can faithfully put off, renew our minds, and put on, we have to be willing to yield ourselves to God. We have to ask ourselves, "Am I willing to hand over the reins of my life to Jesus or do I want to keep calling the shots?"

Romans 12:1 says*: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice…"* And then verse 2 says: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…"* There is a beautiful connection here. Because of God's mercy, we yield ourselves to Him, and we allow Him to transform us as our minds are renewed by His word. Surrender is the posture of our hearts throughout this process: "Lord, I am willing. Your way instead of my way. I trust Your way

more than I trust mine." And that's important because we can know exactly what we're supposed to put off and put on—and still resist God because we want our own way. Now we can understand what Paul means by putting off.

PUT OFF THE OLD SELF

Paul uses a vivid picture here—clothing. The Greek word for "put off" (*apothesthai)* means to lay aside, cast off, or strip off—like taking off an old garment. Paul says we are to put off the old self, which belongs to our former manner of life. You take it off because it no longer belongs to the way you want to live. And that's the picture Paul is giving us. Put off. Strip it away. Lay it aside.

- Put off the old patterns of thinking.
- Put off the lies we have believed.
- Put off sinful desires and responses that belong to our former way of life.

To put off means to deliberately lay aside what belongs to our old way of living. That can be an outward behavior. But it can also be a thought, a desire, or a belief that doesn't agree with God's word.

- Maybe it's fear and the constant need to control.
- Maybe it's believing that your worth depends on what someone else thinks of you.
- Maybe it's bitterness and holding on to unforgiveness.

Putting off means we don't simply excuse those things. We bring them before God and say: “This doesn't belong to the person I am in Christ. I don't want to continue walking this way.”

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He gave the radical command to cut off our hands or pluck out our eyes if they cause us to sin. He wasn't calling for physical mutilation—because sin lives in the human heart, not in our physical body parts. Jesus was emphasizing the seriousness of sin and our need to ruthlessly eliminate the habits, environments, and mindsets that feed temptation.

So what does this kind of radical ‘cutting off’ look like in our everyday lives?

- It can mean removing things that tempt us…maybe deleting an app or avoiding something that feeds a sinful habit.
- It can mean changing our environment…staying away from places or situations where we know we’re likely to fall back into old patterns.
- It means making no provision for the flesh, as Romans 13:14 says…not making it easy for our flesh to have its way, but making choices that help us obey Christ.
- And it can mean bringing hidden struggles into the light and asking a trusted sister in the Lord to hold us accountable.

Puritan pastor John Owen understood the seriousness of this battle. He famously said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Strong words, but Owen understood that the Christian life involves a lifelong battle with remaining sin. And make no mistake: sin is destructive. For some, unchecked sin and addiction can lead to literal physical death. But for every believer, unmortified sin acts like a slow poison. It strangles our spiritual vitality,

chokes out our joy, damages our intimacy with the Lord, fractures our relationships, and hardens our hearts—robbing us of the vibrant fruit God desires to produce in our lives.

We are called to actively put sin to death, but not in our own strength. We depend on Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit as we put off what belongs to our old way of life.

RENEW YOUR MIND

Now we come back to the middle of Paul's progression: *"Be renewed in the spirit of your minds."* This is where the battle often takes place. Thoughts come into our minds all day long. Some are true, some are false, and some are shaped by fear, past experiences, assumptions, or what others have told us. And sometimes we simply believe those thoughts without stopping to question them.

This is why we need to slow down and examine what we're thinking. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. We need to recognize thoughts that don't agree with God's Word and replace them with what is true. So let's make this practical.

Remember our pilot illustration. The storm is real, and the pilot feels the turbulence, but he doesn't let the turbulence determine what is true about the plane. He looks at the instruments.

In the same way, when we're in an emotional storm or seeking to have our thinking line up with God's word, we can pause and ask three simple questions.

- First, capture it.
  What am I thinking and feeling right now? Don't ignore it. Identify it and bring it into the light.
- Second, test it.
  Is what I'm thinking actually true? What does God's Word say about what I'm struggling with? Does this thought agree with who God says I am in Christ?
- Third, replace it.
  Don't simply tell yourself, “Stop thinking that.” Replace what is false with God's truth.

For example, I might think, “I'm anxious. What if everything goes wrong? What if I can't handle what's ahead?”

Now, please hear me on this. Sometimes we are walking through extremely hard things, and it makes sense that we would struggle emotionally. In those times, we draw near to Jesus, rest in His presence, and remember that even in the darkest valley He is with us. Renewing our minds is not denying pain; it is bringing our pain to the One who gives comfort, peace, and healing.

Also, I realize this example is an oversimplification of the process. In real life, renewing our minds can take much longer. We may need to return to God's truth again and again as we learn to trust Him in the midst of what we're facing.

So, keeping in mind that this is a process, let’s walk through what it might look like.

- So I capture the thought: “I'm anxious, and I'm afraid of what might happen.”
- Then I test it against God's Word and let God use His Word to minister to my heart. I remind myself that everything that comes to me is under my loving Father’s

sovereign care. He will never leave me or forsake me. Scripture also tells me to "cast all my anxieties on Him, because He cares for me" (1 Peter 5:7). Philippians 4 reminds me to bring my requests to God in prayer.

- Then I replace the anxious thought with truth: "I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but God does. He is with me, He cares for me, and I can bring my fears to Him. As I spend time in His presence, He comforts my heart and gives me His peace. I can face what lies ahead knowing that He will be with me and give me the grace I need."

And remember, sometimes this is a wrestling process. The anxious thought may come back. And when it does, I go back to the truth again. I keep turning my mind back to what God says is true, and I depend on the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work in me.

Capture it. Test it. Replace it. That's what renewing our minds can look like in everyday life. We bring our thoughts and emotions honestly before God and allow His Word to shape how we see them. As we draw near to Jesus, He comforts us and helps us face what we're going through in light of His truth.

And this is one reason meditating on God's Word is so important. Psalm 119:9–11 says: *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word… I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."*

God has even designed our brains with the ability to form new patterns of thought—a built-in capacity called neuroplasticity. As we repeatedly bring our thinking in line with God's Word, those patterns become stronger. And as we depend on the Holy Spirit, He uses God's Word to renew our minds and transform us to become more like Christ.

And remember, this is often a hard-fought process. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 12:9, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Our weakness is an opportunity to depend on God's strength and allow Him to do in us what we cannot do in our own strength.

God has also given us the body of Christ. Reach out to a trusted sister in the Lord—someone who can come alongside you, pray with you, and help hold up your arms when you feel weak.

So yes, we actively put off sin and renew our minds with God's Word. And as we do, God transforms the way we think and helps us increasingly respond according to His truth.

PUT ON THE NEW SELF

And now we have finally arrived at Ephesians 4:24: *"And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* Again, Paul uses the picture of clothing. The Greek word for "put on" (*endysasthai)* means to put on or clothe oneself. So Paul gives us this beautiful picture:

- Take off the old clothes
- Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.
- Put on the new clothes

And notice what these new clothes look like. Paul says this new self has been *"created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* This brings us back to what we said earlier: Our growth flows out of the standing we already have in Christ. So putting

on the new self means living out the new life God has already given us. The righteousness and holiness Paul speaks of are the outworking of that new life.

God makes us new, and by His grace, our lives increasingly reflect who we already are in Christ. He is changing the way we think, the way we respond, the way we love, and the way we live. And remember where we started.

Who you are in Christ comes before how you live.

- You are God's child.
- You have been adopted.
- You have been forgiven.
- You have been redeemed.
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- You have been set free from sin's dominion.

So now—live like who you are.

And don't miss this: God has work for you to do. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* We get to walk in the good works He has prepared for us—to love people, serve others, encourage one another, use the gifts He has given us, and represent Christ in the places He has put us.

Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* May we live each day from a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving for all that Christ has done for us!

CLOSING

So we've come full circle. Who you are in Christ comes before how you live. Because our standing in Christ is secure, we can put off the old way of life, allow His Word to renew our minds, and put on the new self. Sometimes this is a battle, but the Lord is faithful. He sustains us and continues His work in us.

And there is one final encouragement I want to leave with you: Don't coast. Don't coast when it comes to the daily disciplines of your Christian life. Our daily abiding in Christ is key to a fruitful life. Jesus said in John 15:5, *"Apart from me you can do nothing."* We need Jesus every day. We need to remain in His Word and allow His Word to continually renew our minds.

And perhaps you've been through a hard season. Perhaps you've battled well, you've been faithful, and you're tired. Maybe you're tempted to take a little break. But we can't coast. Spiritual drift usually happens little by little.

Think about a river current. If you stop swimming against it, the current will carry you downstream. And in our Christian lives, we can drift without even realizing it. We gradually neglect the very things that keep us close to Jesus. That's why we must keep abiding in Him, returning to His Word and depending on His grace day by day.

God is at work in you, so live out who you already are in Christ. Walk in the good works He has prepared for you, and let your life increasingly reflect the One who saved you. He is faithfully transforming you to look more and more like Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You that our identity is secure in You—that we are loved, forgiven, redeemed, and made new by Your grace. Help us to surrender daily, put off what belongs to our old way of life, be renewed by Your Word, and abide in You as the Holy Spirit shapes us to live out who we already are. In Jesus' name. Amen.