

Changing Clothes, Eph.4:17-32

Awed By God #9

◆ **Intro:** I was sitting at my desk, in my Iowa church office years ago and I smelled the odor of hogs. Where was it coming from? Earlier that day I had been to Elmer Schmidt's farm. But Elmer was a careful farmer. When we arrived we had to take a shower at his house. Then we donned coveralls that belonged to him, leaving our "city clothes" in the bathroom. Wearing his boots, and his gloves we toured the confinement observing the little piggies in their habitat, all the while pondering how so many good things could come from the same stinky creature, not the least of which was...that's right, the candy of all meats, bacon! But I digress. There I was in my office smelling of hog. But I had removed Elmer's farm attire! I had showered a second time, believe you me! I even hurried from his front door to the door of my car, not having yet become accustomed to "the smell of money" as he called it. Short of bottle brushing my nasal passages, I didn't know what else to do. Taking my glasses off to ponder a moment it hit me. My glasses! They smelled of swine. I hadn't thought to scour my glasses! That day I learned a new meaning to the concept of a change of clothes.

◆ 1. The Bible talks about changing our clothes too. In fact, its as if we have a whole suit of clothing we call the Old Self. And when Jesus comes into our hearts and we repent of sin (which may or may not smell like swine) he gives us a whole new suit of clothes called the New Self.

◆ *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.*

◆ **Everyday God offers me a chance to wear a new self.** Lets look at it.

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- ◆ “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.” Ephesians 4:22-24, NIV.
- ◆ Now to be sure, the new clothes were a gift of God. We cannot earn the right to wear Jesus’s wardrobe of righteousness. The Bible says there is none that have not sinned and fallen short of the right to heaven or holiness. We may however, receive it as a gift paid for by the blood of Christ. We call the gift of forgiveness justification; being made just/right with God by Christ alone. Paul spoke of it earlier in his letter...
 - ◆ “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no-one can boast.” Ephesians 2:4-9, NIV.
- ◆ But then God in his patient wisdom in this life allows us to cooperate with him in holiness. We call that sanctification. Think of it as putting on the new clothes Christ has bought you, as opposed to leaving them in the closet and wearing the raggedy ones you’re used to. Mike talked beautifully about it last week. Living up to the gift we’re given. Living

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according to the design we have. You see, up to this point in his letter Paul has been laying the theological foundation of what God has done in sending his son into the world to change it, and display the awe of his goodness. Starting with our text today, Paul will begin to apply how that truth looks in our lives. What it means for our choices. This is all captured in that little word “so” in verse 17.

- ◆ Chapter 1: God planned to create and to love. God sent Christ to right an off-kilter world. There is a glorious inheritance for those that belong to him.

- ◆ Chapter 2: Men and women are so far gone that they are in fact dead in the soul. So Jesus breathes into people a new life he paid for with his life; grace. He does this with all kinds of people, from all kinds of places, which in turn puts us all on level ground before him.

- ◆ Chapter 3: Even gentiles can be in God’s family, the church. God’s love is what joins people into one; not toleration, not standardlessness that says, "hey all religions are just as good, or whatever your orientation is is fine for you." This is nonsense that fails to cause unity. Caring enough to speak what is true and right in love unifies people, have no doubt about it.

- ◆ Chapter 4: the Christian Church is meant to be the display of unity, family, God, in the world, bound together because we are loved by the same father, taught by him, skilled and gifted to bless the world.

- ◆ Our text: So...get to work. Start making good choices! Start wearing God’s clothes to work, to school, to play.

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◆ The life long process of saying no to the Old Self, and yes to the New Self is called conversion. The Heidelberg Catechism describes it like this:

◆ Q & A 88 What is involved
in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. Two things:

the dying-away of the old self,
and the rising-to-life of the new.¹

Q & A 89 What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. To be genuinely sorry for sin
and more and more to hate
and run away from it.¹

Q & A 90 What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ¹
and a love and delight to live
according to the will of God
by doing every kind of good work.²

◆ All followers of Christ are in the process of conversion at all times, the process of changing the clothes of our soul.

◆ **2.** Now in the rest of Ephesians we'll learn a lot about how God wants life to look. But here I'd like to ask the question of why? **Why does God want us come alive to the new self like Jesus?** Is he just some celestial egomaniac who wants everyone to copy him? Why does God want us to be like Jesus? Why does God give things like the Ten

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Commandments, most of which are expressed in the remainder of Paul's letter? I'll tell you. It's because...

✦ A. It is always in my best interest to follow the ways of the true God. CS Lewis put it,

✦ [E]very time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state of the other."

✦ Did you catch the implied benefit in that quote? A heavenly creature is in harmony with God, other creatures, and itself!! That's where we find joy and peace and power. A hellish creature is in madness, idiocy and loneliness. Our choices are making our experiences heavenly or hellish. What have you been making of yourself in the last several days?

✦ B. Part of the ugliness of sin is it's deceit. Sin never delivers in the end.

Look how Paul describes it.

✦ v17 "futility of thinking

✦ v18 "darkened in understanding, ignorance, hardening of heart"

✦ v19 "given over to sensuality"

✦ We all know exactly what this looks like, don't we? Who hasn't know a friend caught up in a damaging habit, drugs, affair, buying – everyone around them can see them destroying their life, but the person doesn't.

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It's like they are blind. The more you chase something, the more you drink of it, the less fulfilling it is, the more you need of it to get the buzz (be it porn, alcohol, clothes, cars). Many of us are almost shocked back into reality by being caught in the act of something we can't really believe we were doing!

- ◆ Sin lies to us! For example, let's take sex in movies. What always happens in the movies. Girls are longing for their boyfriend to take them to bed. Afterward they gush with their friends about how beautiful it was with the guy they've known for three whole days, or at least something like that. Reality is a whole lot different than anything we watch on TV. Study after study (Heritage Foundation) confirm that there is a direct link between premarital sex and teenage depression, especially for girls. (25.3% of sexually active teen girls report often being depressed, compared to only 7.7% of those saving themselves for marriage.)
- ◆ Jan Davis, 60, a professional veteran parachutist, was involved in a dangerous sport called BASE jumping; leaping off fixed objects like cliffs and towers. It was while BASE jumping that she fell to her death October 22, 1999. Her husband, who was filming the jump, and several reporters were stunned when Jan, the 4th of 5 jumpers, fell for 20 seconds and crashed into the rocks. Her chute had not opened properly. She was jumping off the 3,200 foot granite cliff, El Capitan, in Yosemite National Park, California. She and the other jumpers knew that BASE jumping is illegal in Yosemite Park. The law was adopted because there had already been six deaths in Yosemite along with numerous injuries due to BASE jumping. The five jumpers were in fact protesting the park's jumping

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restrictions and, ironically, were jumping to prove that the sport is safe. These jumpers not only knew the risks, they also knew the law and deliberately broke it. Jan Davis paid with her life. In a similar way, many people think they can deliberately violate God's law. But eventually people learn, sometimes the hard way, that God's laws are there for a reason: our well-being.

◆ Contrary to popular opinion, sin is not what you want to do but can't; it is what you should not do because it will hurt you--and hurt you bad. ... God is not a policeman; He is a Father concerned about His children. When a child picks up a snake and the father says, "Put that down right this minute!" the child thinks he's losing a toy. The fact is, he is not losing a toy; he is losing a snake. Citation: Steve Brown.

◆ **3. I find victory over the Old Self by feeding the New Self.** Like the pitbull breeder who never lost a bet on a dog fight with his dogs. When his child asked him how he always knew which dog would win, his reply was "the one I feed." Now a lot of times you and I decide that we've had enough of a habit or a sin, or an old way in our lives and we decide, today is the last time I do this, say that, etc. But will power will not change you. God's power however can change you, but you will have to continually choose it in the moment. Notice in our text how Paul does not give a list of "no no's" or "thou shalt nots" without also giving the necessary life-giving "yesees" and "shalls".

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◆v25 stop lying, faking, shading the truth. Do speak truthfully to your neighbor. You say “I didn’t lie.” But did to tell everything you should have? Did you tell them what was in the fine print?

◆v27 stop stealing people’s stuff. Earn your products and paychecks. And on top of that, if you really want to stop the sin of taking taking taking, then start sharing, and giving things away!

“...have something to share with those in need.”

◆v29 drop the foul language. If you really want to stop a habit of a dirty mouth, try intentionally saying things that “are helpful for building others up.” You say, “I don’t swear.” But do you compliment you kids, or your coworkers, or the people around you?

◆v31 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...” Old Self. “Be kind and compassionate, ...forgiving”: New Self.

◆Don’t make the mistake of thinking you can empty out your Old Self without filling up the New Self. Jesus told this story:

◆*““He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters. “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”” Luke 11:23-26, NIV.*

◆Lets say you come under conviction that you watch hours of movies or TV where people are unfaithful, and kill other people left and right, and talk like sailors, and celebrate men who want to marry men, and women

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who want to be boys. So you say to yourself. I'm not going to do that anymore. You sweep your screens clean so to speak. If that's all you do, it won't be long until your right back where you were. No, you need to use your HDTV to put something good in your head. Don't leave the head empty. It's like taking off your smelly clothes, but not putting any clean ones on. It's gonna get chilly, and your gonna be vulnerable, and besides...what about the rest of us?! No, put on the New Self. Clothe your life with the new. Put God's words in your head through reading, or music, or story, or whatever, but don't pretend being neutral will get you anywhere.

✦ "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." Romans 6:13, NIV.

✦ *"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:22, 23, NIV.*

✦ **Conclusion:** Do you remember what it was like to get new shoes as a kid? If you were like me, you were sure you could run faster, jump higher, maybe tall buildings? Or new school clothes? The freshness was exciting. Listen, God wants you and me to live in awe of all the good he is and does. We will find the awe when we choose to feed the New Self.

✦ Now a word about that. Don't try to put on the New Self all by yourself. It is next to impossible to conquer alone. As any 12 Step Program will tell

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you, we need others to overcome negative thoughts, addictions and habits. Perhaps that's why Paul talked so much about the unity of the Church in the previous chapters before he got to our text. Seek others. A trusted friend. A counsellor. Your Life Group. Other followers of Christ. We all have Old Self baggage and some of it is more than we can sort through alone. But true awe comes when we do more than avoid a bad thing here and there. It comes when good replaces bad, and heaven replaces hell in our lives. Where might the Holy Spirit be inviting you this morning to choose the heavenly creature, the True Self that God intends for you? Lets talk to God about it...