

Ephesians

4:17-32

Introduction

Dress codes are a constant source of conflict. It's hard to agree upon a standard of dress that is appropriate for everyone involved. Once agreed upon, there are always those who test it with some article of clothing that is borderline inappropriate. Many institutions opt for a uniform, thinking it will resolve the conflicts once and for all. They soon discover that people will add to, or subtract from, their uniform – making a dress code for uniforms necessary!

Churches have both *official* and *unofficial* dress codes. I've read elaborate rules for women's clothing: No pants or shorts of any kind, only floor-length skirts; long-sleeve blouses that button to the chin; a head-covering worn over hair that cannot be cut but must be worn up in a bun.

Churches without an official dress code all have unofficial dress codes. You can see what is considered appropriate or inappropriate by simply looking around the auditorium.

The apostle Paul says that **all** Christians have a dress code. He tells you to "put off" certain clothing and to "put on" certain other clothing. He's not, however, talking about your *physical* clothing; he's talking about your *spiritual* clothing, or what we would call conduct.

But here is a key point: Your conduct is not determined by an *external* standard, but by an *internal* standard. It is determined by what Paul calls in verse twenty-three, the "renewed... spirit of your mind."

Your renewed mind is the key to understanding what is both appropriate and inappropriate conduct for a Christian. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Your Renewed Mind Reviews And Rejects Inappropriate Conduct, and #2 Your Renewed Mind Receives And Rejoices In Appropriate Conduct.

#1 Your Renewed Mind Reviews And Rejects
Inappropriate Conduct
(v17-19; 22)

We won't get to the renewed mind until verse twenty-three but, since it is the key to our comments, I want to say a word about what it means. Paul says you are to be "renewed in the spirit of your mind." A modern paraphrase for "spirit of your mind" would be the compound word *mind-set*. Mind-set has this definition: "A fixed mental disposition that predetermines a person's responses to, and interpretations of, situations." That is exactly the idea.

You have a mind before you get saved, but because you are born dead in trespasses and sins it is set a certain way. The best definition of the unsaved mind-set is found in Romans 8:7 where you read, "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (NASB).

When you are saved by grace through faith, you are made alive – *and that includes your mind*. You are given a new "fixed mental disposition" that is set on spiritual things, in harmony with God. Listen carefully: Your new spiritual mind-set cannot ever be discovered through religion or science or by any other human effort. It is not something that is already in you, waiting to be unlocked. It is given to you by God when you are made alive at salvation. You are born with a fleshly mind-set; you are born-again with a spiritual mind-set.

These first verses in our text elaborate upon the fleshly, hostile mind-set you were born with. If you review your former way of thinking, you'll find it was *deceived, darkened, and depraved*.

Your mind-set was deceived:

Ephesians 4:17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,

Paul's opening remarks are his way of saying that this is the Lord talking to us through him. The "rest of the Gentiles" means those who are still unsaved. They "walk," or conduct themselves, "in the futility of their mind." "Futility" means *vanity*, or emptiness. H.A. Ironside translates it *mirage*. That's the idea. Picture a man

wandering aimlessly in the desert, on the verge of death. His mind deceives him into seeing a mirage – an oasis of water, shade, and food. He pursues it... But it is always further off until he dies.

You were born dead in trespasses and sins. Your mind deceives you into thinking you can find meaning and purpose in your life apart from God. But all the while it is only a mirage.

Your mind-set was darkened:

Ephesians 4:18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

Some commentators read this as a progression which states the conclusion first. In other words, “blindness of... heart” leads to “ignorance,” which leads to “being alienated from the life of God,” which results in your “understanding” – your mind – “being darkened.” “Blindness” should be translated *hardness*. This, then, describes a deliberate and willful rejection of God that leads to a downward spiral.

The mind of the unbeliever thinks it is enlightened while all the time it is operating in darkness. It thinks it ‘discovers’ new philosophies and psychologies, all the while deliberately rejecting the only source of truth, God’s Word.

Your mind-set was depraved:

Ephesians 4:19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

“Past feeling” is something like being anesthetized. “Lewdness” is lack of moral restraint, especially in the area of sexual sin. “Work all uncleanness” means to make a profitable business out of what is morally wrong. “Greediness” is exploitation for your own gain. Taken together this is a phrase that all too perfectly describes the mind-set of our contemporary culture. We would say it is depraved.

You review your former mind-set in order to reject it. Drop down to verse twenty-two for a moment.

Ephesians 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

When you get saved, you become a new creation with a renewed mind; **but you're still in your current body**. Your current body is the "old man" in these verses. Until you leave your current body behind you still have sin to deal with. The Bible calls your old man with its resident desires to sin the *flesh*. Whenever your flesh "lusts," seeking to be satisfied in some inappropriate manner, you should review the truth about where it is leading you. It **always** leads you on a downward spiral against and away from God.

Paul puts this in the form of an illustration. He compares your conduct to clothing and says that you have a choice to make. Are you going to continue to wear the inappropriate clothing of your fleshly mind-set? *Of course not!* Put it off and instead put-on clothing more appropriate.

#2 Your Renewed Mind Recognizes And Rejoices In Appropriate Conduct (v20-21; 23-32)

You were spiritually dead; you are made alive when you believe in Jesus. You begin having a personal relationship with Him. Paul describes your new relationship with God through Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 4:20 But you have not so learned Christ,

Ephesians 4:21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

The most important word in these two verses is a word that is **not** there. It is the word "about." Paul does not say that you learn "about" Christ; he says you "learn Christ." I can learn "about" any historical figure by reading and studying. But I can only "learn" someone who is alive and with whom I communicate. That is the idea here.

Paul told the Ephesians that they "heard" and were "taught by" Jesus Himself. Now that is odd, because Jesus was in heaven, and Paul was their teacher. *Odd, but true!* When you read God's Word; when you talk to Him in prayer; when you hear the still small voice of His Spirit within you; when you hear His Word taught or shared; in these and other ways, you are hearing directly from, and being taught immediately by, the risen and living Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

Renewed is in a verb tense that indicates a continuous and ongoing daily process. The spirit of your mind was *made new* when you believed. It is *renewed* day-by-day in your fellowship with God.

Ephesians 4:24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Your mind-set is now one of “righteousness and holiness.”
Righteousness describes your relationship with others on earth;
holiness describes your relationship with God in heaven.

The mind-set of righteousness and holiness will motivate conduct that is appropriate for a Christian. Paul sticks with his clothing illustration. When last we saw you, you were taking-off inappropriate clothing. Now you need to replace it with clothing appropriate for a Christian.

Verses twenty-five through thirty-two discuss some of your wardrobe choices. The Ephesian Christians were still wearing some inappropriate articles: falsehood, wrath, robbery, and filth. They should review and reject these as belonging to their old mind-set and then recognize and rejoice in alternative conduct now made possible by the renewed spirit of their mind.

This putting-off of the old and putting on of the new is never just a change of conduct. ***It's not a new dress code!*** It is a whole new “fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines your responses to and interpretations of situations.” Let me put it this way: Your mind is recreated the day you get saved, then renewed everyday after that as you walk with God. A recreated and renewed mind leads to a transformation of your conduct.

You recognize and rejoice in a transformed truthfulness:

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*” for we are members of one another.

“Falsehood” is a better word, because “lying” includes lies, exaggeration, and failing to tell the whole truth. The former mind-set was given to falsehood to protect and promote yourself. But now your mind-set is to protect and promote others, so you want to tell them the truth. You recognize that, if they are Christians, they are a

part of you, so if you are false to them you are actually hurting Jesus and yourself.

You recognize and rejoice in a transformed temperament:

Ephesians 4:26 *“Be angry, and do not sin”*: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Here you learn that there was “wrath” characterized some of their relationships. “Wrath” is a fleshly temperament of *irritation* and *resentment*. “Do not let the sun go down” is Paul’s way of saying that this wrath was going unresolved. They should have been quick to try to resolve any such feelings towards one another.

“Be angry, and do not sin” is a qualifier. Not all anger is sinful. Anger against sin and unrighteousness is good and even necessary. Paul might be telling them that, rather than being angry at others, *they should have a righteous anger at their own irritation and resentment!*

Today we hear a lot about anger and anger management. If you are not a Christian, the anger-management solution is salvation. If you are a Christian, the anger-management solution is to stop being angry!

You recognize and rejoice in a transformed trustworthiness:

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

This verse is talking about your employment. It was common in their culture for slaves and stewards to steal. In fact, it was expected. Christians were still doing this; they were not any more trustworthy than non-Christians. The new mind-set recognized this as wrong and rejoiced instead in hard work to help others.

You recognize and rejoice in a transformed tongue:

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

“Corrupt” is a word used to describe rotten fruit. Ever bite into a piece of rotten fruit? You immediately are repulsed and spit it out. Instead

of spitting out rotten words, you rejoice in that you can build up others, choosing your words so that they are gracious.

The remaining verses are a sort of overall summary of the transformation that takes place. You recognize and rejoice in a transformed testimony:

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Verse thirty-one is what you ought to put-off; verse thirty-two is what you ought to put-on. When you do, you will have a testimony that others can see and you can share.

At first reading, you don't see exactly how you are supposed to accomplish this change of clothes. Ah, but you *are* told how – in verse thirty! You have a new mind-set **and** you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you to prompt you to go on setting your mind on the things of God. He has “sealed you for the day of redemption.” We saw in chapter one that His sealing means that He is working *within* us and *upon* us to press us into the image of Jesus. We would say the Holy Spirit is making us more like Jesus, and He is doing it everyday until “the day of redemption.” You are saved, but you are still in your old body of flesh. The “day of redemption” is the day that you, either by death or in the Rapture, lay aside your current body and are free from the flesh and its mind-set once and for all.

Conclusion

Christianity results in transformed conduct, but it is *not* a new dress code. You have a new, spiritual mind-set that is constantly being renewed, and you have God within you to help you choose your clothes! You can “grieve” Him by choosing inappropriate clothing; or you can *glorify* Jesus by choosing appropriate clothing.

